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LAST SHEAVES

LAST SHEAVES



BY

ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D.D., LITT. D.

NEW YORK
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TO
THE CHURCH
AND CONGREGATION OF
UNION CHAPEL MANCHESTER
IN GRATEFUL ACKNOWLEDGMENT
OF THEIR LOVE AND
TRUST UNBROKEN
FOR FORTY-FIVE
YEARS

Prefatory Note

THE title which I have given to this volume refers to the fact, more weighty to me than to my readers, that its contents were for the most part preached during the last of my forty-five years' pastorate in Manchester, and are now published almost simultaneously with my retirement. I shall, I hope, be pardoned and sympathized with, if I express here something of the solemn and pensive emotions with which I send forth this volume. I am well aware of the defects and limitations of this as of my other books, but I am deeply thankful to God for any good that He has allowed them to do, and to many unknown friends in many lands who have heartened me by telling me that I have been able to help them in some measure. I cannot issue this volume without thanking them and asking them to remember me in their prayers.

Contents

IN THE UPPER ROOM

	PAGE
A SOUL'S TRAGEDY	1
“DO QUICKLY”	13
“THE CROSS OF GLORY”	24
CANNOT AND CAN	35
SEEKING JESUS	45

	PAGE
“ AS I HAVE LOVED ”	56
“ WHY CANNOT I FOLLOW THEE NOW ”. . . .	68
THE COLLAPSE OF SELF-CONFIDENCE	78
<hr/>	
THE DEVOUT LIFE HERE AND HEREAFTER	91
RIGHTEOUSNESS FIRST, PEACE SECOND. . . .	103
TWO SHEPHERDS AND TWO FLOCKS	115
DEATH, THE FRIEND	128
A FIGHT WITH DEPRESSION	139
THIRST AND SATISFACTION	148
A SONG OF FAITH	160

CONTENTS

xi

PAGE

FORGIVENESS AND RETRIBUTION 172

SAINTS, BELIEVERS, BRETHREN 184

PRUDENCE AND FAITH 197

“NEVER IN BONDAGE” 207

WHAT A GOOD MAN IS AND HOW HE IS MADE . . . 219

THE ORIGINAL AND THE COPY—

I. IMITATIVE MIRACLES 231

II. “CONFORMABLE TO HIS DEATH” . . . 242

“WITHOUT THE CAMP” 252

AT THE ALTAR 264

	PAGE
GREAT HOPES A GREAT DUTY . . .	275
GREAT HOPES AND A GREAT POWER . . .	287
THE SINGERS BY THE SEA	300

A Soul's Tragedy

And when Jesus had dipped the sop, He gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. And after the sop Satan entered into him.—
JOHN xiii. 26, 27.

A CASUAL onlooker would have seen nothing in Christ's giving, and Judas' taking, the moistened morsel but an ordinary act of courtesy or kindness done by a host to his guest. But below the trivial act there was going on a struggle, a momentary hesitation, a grim resolution, and a tragedy—the tragedy of a soul. It was all done in a minute. Not a word was spoken; and yet the moment before, Judas might have abandoned his purpose, —perhaps he half abandoned it while he stretched out his hand,—but ere he had swallowed the bit of bread, he had pulled himself together, and said once more, “I will!” With his own hand he slammed to the door, and the reverberation of it sounded hollow in his soul. A man may ruin himself in a moment, and a little turn in the direction of a life may influence all that comes after it, however far the line is produced.

There are two figures, isolated from all the world,
M.S. 1 1

in the picture of my text—Jesus and Judas ; one radiant with more than mortal whiteness and lustre ; one dark—as we sometimes think, though wrongly—with more than human blackness. They had a common secret that separated them from the others. Judas understood what Christ meant by the sop ; and Christ understood what Judas meant by the look with which he took it. If we go beneath the mere surface of the act, we find lessons very solemn and of universal application, and perhaps we shall best gather and harvest them if we simply study these two figures, silhouetted against the sky : Jesus making the last appeal of patient, wounded love, and Judas steeling himself against it. Let us look at the two.

I.—JESUS MAKING THE LAST APPEAL OF PATIENT, WOUNDED LOVE.

Remember the sequence of the preceding scene, for it throws light upon the incident with which we are more immediately concerned. Our Lord had been sitting silent, absorbed in thought of the near end. He broke the silence, suddenly, with the pained announcement that the traitor was “one of you.” Then came a universal shock of surprise, and each man scrutinised his neighbour with suspicion, and all assailed Jesus with the question, “Who is it ?” He answered, and did not answer ; for to the general interrogation He simply replied with what was tantamount to, and no more than, His previous declaration, “one of you.”

For all the token given to the twelve was : " he that dippeth with Me in the dish," and according to the habits of Easterns, all the hands went into the dish at one time or other together. So that the answer was no answer, in so far as their curiosity was concerned, but fixed once more their attention on the sad fact that " one of them " was to be the traitor. Then came John's whispered question, which evidently was unknown to the others, with the exception of the prompter of it, Peter. The answer, too, was whispered, for even after Jesus had said : " he to whom I shall give the sop when I have dipped it," none of those sitting at the table suspected why Judas had rushed out of the apartment. Christ did not give the sop in order to satisfy John's curiosity, but He had made up His mind to do it before John's question, and for a far deeper reason than to supply a means of identification.

What, then, was the meaning of it ? What was the meaning of it in ordinary intercourse ? It meant kindness and friendliness. It was a token of special regard and interest. It meant a reminder of past familiarity. It meant all these, when Christ gave the sop into the trembling hand that received it. He was not indicating Judas for John's benefit ; He was not acting ; but He was giving way to the deep emotions of His heart at the moment, and meaning infinitely more than the common-place act meant in ordinary

hands. For Christ infuses a deeper significance into conventional courtesies. He gave His love when He gave the sop, even to His betrayer, whom He knew as such. If one, therefore, thinks for a moment of Who it was that gave, and how entirely He knew the tortuous treachery of the man to whom He gave it, the conventional act towers up into a strange significance and pathetic beauty ; and carries with it not only a glimpse into the heart of Jesus, but, because it does give a glimpse into His heart, it thereby reveals the heart of God.

If we try to realize to ourselves what was the human emotion which prompted the Lord's act, we shall read in it, I think, pain and disappointment indeed, that love had been repelled and teaching misunderstood, and that all the blessed familiarities and friendliness of those three years of discipleship had only come to this. But we shall not find one faint, transient flush of anger in His calm cheek, nor one momentarily quickened throb of indignation in His patient heart. Christ pitied, and was not angry. The same tone of compassion for the man that was doing himself so much more harm than he was doing his apparent victim, runs through even the solemn words which He had spoken at a previous time : " Woe unto that man ! Good were it for that man if he had never been born ! " That is a groan of sympathy, far more than a denunciation of wrath.

So, dear brethren, believing, as I suppose most of us do, whatever metaphysical explanation of the fact may lie behind it, that in Jesus Christ and His human emotions and acts we have the clearest revelation of the heart, and the authoritative explanation of the acts, of God Himself, may we not see here, in that sop, the token of amity given to the traitor—the great and blessed message that no sin, no transgression against love and gratitude, can turn away from a man the love of God? Most of us, I suppose, are accustomed to think that “Heaven heads the count of crimes” with that traitorous act. I question that. But though Judas were the worst man that ever lived—if there is a worst—the love of God in Jesus Christ hovered round that man in the moment of his supreme sin. Sin is mighty; it can do awful things in the way of disturbing the relation between man and God. But there is one thing it cannot do; it cannot make Him who loves us, not because of anything in ourselves, but because of what He is in Himself, cease to love us. The sunshine falls equally on a dunghill and on a diamond. The great ocean washes over the blackest and the barrenest rock as lovingly as it kisses the smiling strand of fertile lands. The air and the light stream into foetid alleys of the city as willingly as they sweep over the purity of the mountain side. And the love of God is not turned away by transgression, howsoever the manifestation of that love must be modified thereby.

So, then, here is one lesson for us,—Let no sin ever lead us to think that a man is parted from the seeking love of God.

But then, again, let me remind you that not only was this gift of the sop the token of kindness and friendship, but that it was a direct appeal, seeking to win Judas back by the manifestation of the Saviour's love to him. Judas was not past the possibility of yet being won. He had been to the High Priest, he had settled his plans, but until the deed was actually done, there was a possibility that it might never be done. And disregarding for the moment all wider questions, we may say that Jesus had only the thought in His heart, "Can I save this man from this great sin? Let Me try once more." So He appeals to him by that familiar and pathetic act, as if He would say to him, "Have you forgotten all our memories, all the past associations, all the sweet friendlinesses and private communions of these years? Will you not come back, and give up your mad purpose of betraying Me?" There, too, brethren, is a revelation for us; for there, too, we have mirrored forth, set before us in a concrete example of such a nature as that it may seem to be the very superlative of the appealing love of God, the great fact that Jesus Christ never gives up any as hopeless, that there are no outcasts in His view, to whom the moral and quickening influences of His manifested love cannot do any good. There is some spot, He

believes, and He would have us believe, sensitive to good in the most hardened bad ; there is some little cranny, He believes, and He would have us believe, in the most close-knit strength of a steeled heart, through which the love-making message of His love may find its way. Therefore, He appealed to the betrayer. Do you say : " He knew it was of no use " ? And is there not some strange apparent contradiction between what we believe of God's fore-knowledge and what we know of God's unwearied patience and persistence of appeal ? Use or no use, the heart of Jesus forced Him to make this last attempt. He made it, and it failed, so far as Judas was concerned. But the act stands recorded, as one pathetic and permanent proof that that Divine Lover, in Whose humanity we all of us recognize the highest revelation of the heart of God, fulfilled the ideal of Love which His servant afterwards portrayed, in that He " suffered long, and was kind," in that He " hoped all things," even at the moment before the treachery was consummated, and in that when His enemy hungered He gave Him bread, when he was athirst He gave him drink, desiring thereby to heap coals of fire upon his head, that might melt the obstinate ore and cause it to flow forth. He gave the sop, a token of love, and an appeal to Judas to return.

And now, dear friends, I have been saying that Christ in this instructive act of patient love revealed the heart of God. Ay ! but He does more ; He reveals

the pattern for us men. It is hard for us not to meet hate with hate and scorn with scorn. It is hard for us to keep the narrow line that separates legitimate pain and sorrow at an enemy's enmity from non-legitimate enmity and wrath. We are apt to give back to the world, and to men around us, the face with which they look upon us. But Jesus Christ has bid us—and there is no wriggling out of the duty, hard as it may be—to meet enmity with love, and wrong with patient endurance, and to answer the spurt of the fires of hatred with the gush of the extinguishing water of love. That is our duty. We forget it. We break it; we formulate reasons against it. But for the individual and for the nation Christ's pattern has to be followed, and Christ's principles to be obeyed. We must remember not only that "force is no remedy," but that hatred is no remedy either. An enemy crushed is tenfold an enemy; an enemy won is a hundredfold a friend. There is the law for us.

And there is another lesson here. Never despair of any man. Do not drop into the fashionable way of regarding certain classes and certain races as outside the pale and the power of Christ's Gospel. There is no man whom His arm cannot reach; there is no man, and no class, whom it is not the duty of His servants, to try to reach.

And there is yet another lesson, and that is, that the only way to win men to love is to show that you

love them. That is the omnipotent way ; that is Christ's way.

Now, let us turn to the other side,

II. THAT BLACK FIGURE THAT STANDS THERE,
grim and silent, possibly hesitating for a moment,
but fixed at last in his determination.

“ When he had taken the sop, Satan entered into him.” That was no magic ; it was the certain result of what went on in Judas' heart, when he took the sop. He refused the love that gave it, whilst he took that which the love gave. There we are brought face to face with the mystery and the tragedy of humanity. A man can thwart all the influences that redeeming, seeking love can bring to bear upon him. The flower can shut up its calyx, and keep out all the sunshine. The earth can drink in the rain, and then it gets a blessing, or it can fling it off, and then it inherits cursing, and is nigh to be burned. Nobody can explain what everybody knows, and, alas ! is himself an example of—the possibility of the tiny, impotent human will, perking itself in the face of God, and saying, “ I will not.” “ How often would I . . . but ye would not.” But, if the power is strange, surely the fact that we so commonly exercise it is stranger and sadder still,—that any man should, as so many of us are doing, put away from himself the influences that are being brought to bear upon him, as truly as Christ's seeking love was brought to bear on the traitor. Day by day, by all the

various providences of our lives, by many a voice in our own consciences, by many a strange drawing of which we are conscious and which we resist, and above all by the revelation of Himself in the Word, and—dare I say?—by this poor presentation of it by my lips, Christ is still seeking to draw us to Himself. And some of us are neglecting, and some of us are resisting and none of us are yielding as we ought to yield.

For whenever some high thought comes to us, and we put it away; whenever some nobler conception of duty and life is revealed to us, and we are unfaithful to it; whenever between two courses of action we choose the baser, and turn away from the nobler, then we are doing what the traitor did when he took the sop. And whenever any of us are brought in contact once more with the message of salvation in Jesus Christ, and dismiss it lightly, or yield to it partially, or forget it when we go out again into the world, then I know not whether of the two is the more guilty, the man who did not know what he was doing when he betrayed the Christ, or the man who, by neglecting His message from heaven, “crucifies the Son of God afresh, and puts Him to an open shame.”

But turn, before I close, to the other thought that lies here. We have seen that in Judas there is an eminent instance of the strange and wicked steeling of the will against the love of God. Mark the consequences of that steeling—“Satan entered into him.”

Why ? Because he had not let Christ enter into him. Shutting the door against the love of Christ opens the door for the devil. Where Christ is not, Satan is, and "brings seven other spirits, and they enter in and dwell there, and the last of that man is worse than the first." Every appeal to the conscience that is put aside makes the next appeal less likely to succeed. You fire a shell against an earthwork ; that brings down the face of the earthwork and makes débris which guards the core of it against the next shell. A man may be so case-hardened by his own resistance as that conscience cannot drive its lance through the tenacious surface. Every base choice makes subsequent noble choices less likely. Every time that a man is brought into contact with Jesus Christ, and fails to yield full obedience and trust, that man is less likely ever to yield. Something the giving of the sop did. If it did not melt, it hardened. There is no ice so tough, so slippery, as ice which is melted on the surface by the few hours of the winter sun, and then locked again in the bonds of the frost when night falls. Half-melted hearts frozen again are frozen harder than ever.

We are accustomed to think of Judas as almost outside the pale of sympathy. Dante puts him alone in hell, shunned and loathed even there. But he was no monster, and he became what he was, and did what he did, by yielding to ordinary temptations and ordinary motives. What his motives may have been is a pro-

blem. He was with Jesus Christ, and he was not made better thereby ; therefore he was made worse. He companied with the Teacher and Lover of souls ; and he did not learn the teaching or accept the love, and therefore he hated Him that gave them both. As for his guilt, it is in better hands than ours. As for his fate, we had better imitate the reticence of the Apostle who said : " He went to his own place," the place that he was fit for, wherever that was. As for his growth in sin, let us remember that he reached the goal by a path that we may all take, and that it culminated when he did what we may all do, accepted the token of Christ's love, and rejected the love that gave the token. Therefore, " Satan entered into him." " And having received the sop, he went out, and it was night " ; himself carrying a blacker night in his black heart. May we learn the lesson, and accept the love, so that we may be not of the night, or of darkness, but the children of light, and of the day !

“ Do Quickly ”

Then said Jesus unto him, that thou doest, do quickly.—*JOHN*
xiii. 27.

“ **T**HAT thou doest”—not “ art about to do.” For, when the die was cast and the resolution fixed, the deed, so far as its doer’s responsibility and its effects on his character were concerned, was already done. When David’s desire to build the Temple was negatived, it was said to him, “ Forasmuch as it was in thine heart ” it was counted as performed. Human law deals with acts. All noble morality and God’s law, which is the noblest of all, deals with intentions. So, not merely because he had already been to the priests but because he had fixed in his mind to do it, Judas is regarded by Christ as already in course of doing his base action. The principle holds good in reference to good and to evil purposes. Foiled aspirations after good and thwarted inclinations to evil are both regarded by Him as already done.

But did not Jesus Christ push Judas over the precipice by this strange command ? No ; he had flung himself

over before the command was given. As I tried to show when speaking about the previous part of this verse, when the sop was given he was tottering on the edge ; after he had taken the sop he had gone over. And what Christ says here has no bearing on the decision to do the deed, but simply on the manner in which it was to be done. The command is not “ do,” but “ do quickly.”

But now it seems to me that the point of view from which these words are mainly to be looked at is one which is generally almost ignored. Suppose instead of puzzling ourselves with asking the question how they affected Judas, we ask the question, “ What do they say about Jesus ? ” To me they seem to be far more instructive and illuminative when considered as being almost an instinctive cry from His heart, and having reference to Himself, than when we look upon them as being an instruction to the betrayer. The two references are both there, and I think that in order to understand all the deep significance of this strange injunction we have to take both into account. My purpose now is to try to embrace both these elements or points of view in our consideration.

First, then—and, to me, by far the more important—I cannot but hear in this injunction,

I.—THE CRY OF A HUMAN INSTINCT IN THE PROSPECT OF A GREAT PAIN AND SORROW.

“ That thou doest do quickly.” Do we not all know that feeling in looking forward to something unwelcome

or painful that is impending—“ would it were over ? ” There are few things that try the firmest nerves more than the long anticipation of the leaden footsteps of the slow hours that bring us some great trial, shock, or loss. The cup of bitterness is less bitter when we can drink it off at a gulp ; more bitter when it has to be sipped. Anticipated sorrows make men more impatient than do anticipated joys, And it seems to me that here we have just that strange paradox that we all know so well, of stretching out a hand to bring the thing from which we shrink nearer to us, just because we shrink from it. Does it not make us feel the beatings of a brother’s heart if we think that Jesus turned to the betrayer, and after He had given up trying to influence him, said in effect : “ The one kindness you can still show Me is to do your work quickly.” He shrank from the Cross, and *therefore* He desired that it should come swiftly. For He, too, knew the agony of protracted anticipation, and would fain hasten the slow drip, drip drip, of the laggard moments, and bring, and have done with, that which He knew was coming. If we found such a saying as this recorded in the biography of any great martyr or hero, we should at once come to the conclusion that he was therein expressing a natural, instinctive feeling. Why should we scruple, except from a misplaced reverence, to say that the same feeling is expressed when the words come from the lips of Jesus Christ ? His death was unique, but He shows

us His brotherhood, not only in the fact, but in the manner, of the death, and in His attitude towards it, when it was yet but an anticipation and a near prospect.

One is the more inclined to hear that familiar tone in the words of my text, if we remember how something of the same kind of desire to accelerate that from which He shrank is obvious during all the narrative of His last days. Do you remember how He set His face as a flint on His last journey to Jerusalem, with such a tension in His countenance and resolved determination in His swift steps up the rocky road from Jericho, that the disciples were conscious of something unusual and followed, as the Evangelist says, silently and in amazement? What was the meaning of our Lord's entire reversal of all His previous policy—if I may use that word—on the occasion of His public entrance into Jerusalem? What was the meaning of His daily going into the Temple, casting out the money-changers, and pouring out the vials of His hot indignation upon scribes and pharisees and official hypocrites and malefactors? Did it not all point to this, that He had resolved that the time was come, and that if we cannot say He deliberately accelerated, at all events He did not seek in the smallest degree to retard, the fall of the thunder-bolt? Nay rather, He deliberately sought the publicity and took up the position of antagonism, which were certain to lead to the Cross. I suppose that He, too, who had travelled all

His life—if we believe the New Testament narratives—with that black thing closing the vista ahead, was conscious, as He drew nearer and nearer to it, that in a strange way it both repelled and attracted Him. And so, if I might so say, He turned to Judas, as a lamb that was being slain might have lifted its innocent eyes to the sacrificer, and said, “Do it quickly!” Ah! brethren, that brings Him very near weak hearts.

Let me say one word, before I go further, about that of which the wish to get it over was a symptom, viz., the shrinking from the Cross. It was perfectly instinctive and natural, the recoil of the sensitive, corporeal nature from pain and suffering, which is neither right nor wrong in itself, being natural and involuntary. But there was something more, as we see from the story of the last hours. Most men, however much they are cowards in their lives, die calmly: Jesus Christ did not. The agitation, the horror of great darkness, the recoil and desolation of His whole nature, are neither heroic nor admirable; nor explicable, in my poor judgment, except on one hypothesis: “The Lord hath made to meet on Him the iniquity of us all.” That burden weighed Him down, and made His death less calm than have been the deaths of thousands whose calmness came from Himself. If we bring in that deeper element, we understand not only the cry of desolation that broke tragically through the silent, dark hours, but we understand the shrinking, and the strange paradox of feel-

ing which turns the shrinking into its apparent opposite, when He said, “ That thou doest, do quickly.”

But if we would probe the whole depth of the revelation, which is given in this saying, of our Lord's own emotions and thoughts, we have to turn, I think, to another aspect of it. I have spoken of this being the expression of His shrinking from the Cross, but can you not hear in it an expression also of His resolved will to go to the Cross ? That shrinking of which I have been speaking, and which I have called purely human, instinctive and involuntary, and perfectly neutral, in so far as any moral quality is concerned—that shrinking, if I may use such a figure, never climbed up from the lower depths of instinctive feeling into the place where the Will sat enthroned. The mist lay in the bottoms ; the summit kept always clear. He shrank, but He never allowed His will to waver. The tempest beat on the windward side of the ship, but the helm was kept firm, and the bow pointed always in the same direction. Jesus Christ was steadfast in His purpose from the beginning to the end. “ The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many ; ” and so, all His life long, through all those gracious and wonderful ministrations of His, when His heart was open to all distress, and his eye open to all the loveliness of nature, the flowers of the field, and the lilies of the plain, there lay in His heart the fixed purpose to die for men.

Brethren, why was Jesus Christ thus determined ?

What was it that kept the fixed will thus ever pointing in the one direction ? What was it that shut down the shrinking, that coerced the nature which innocently and necessarily recoiled from suffering and pain ? I believe it was two things : one, that Jesus Christ's own conception of the significance and place of His death differed altogether in kind from the conception that a martyr, who is willing to die for a cause, and to pay down his life as the price of his faithfulness, might entertain. To Jesus Christ, as I read His own sayings, death was not the inevitable consequence of His discharging the mission which He was ready to face, but it was, shall I say, the climax of the mission, and that for which He was born.

And then, still deeper, if you ask me why was He thus rigidly and constantly determined to die ?—I answer it was Love that backed up His will, and kept it from ever wavering. Because He loved us, and gave Himself for us, therefore, as I have said, He resisted the instinctive shrinking from the Cross, and kept Himself steadily determined to endure it, despising the shame. Like some strong spring, always active, behind some object which it presses constantly forward against a cutting knife, so the love of Jesus Christ bore Him onward, all through His career, and if I may not say that it *drove* Him, I may say that it *led* Him, through all His sufferings unto the last of all.

It was a universal love, and it was an individualising

love. “He loved me,” says the apostle, “and gave Himself for me.” Each of us has the right—and if we have the right, we are under the obligation—to say the same thing, and to take of that great river of the water of life and love that flows out of the heart of Jesus, and turn it into our own little plot of ground. Because He loved me He went to “the Cross, despising the shame,” He subdued the shrinking, and welcomed death. When He hung on the Cross, and when He sits on the Throne, His love embraced and embraces you and me. May we take it, and be at rest!

And now turn to

II.—THE OTHER ASPECT OF THIS STRANGE COMMANDMENT,

and think of how it affected the betrayer. There we have the solemn leaving of a man to take his own way.

I have already said that this is almost a kind of appeal to any lingering pity or kindness that there might be left in Judas. But it is more than that. Christ still keeps His position of authority over the traitor, and when He says to him, “That thou doest, do quickly,” it is a word of command, which says: “I am ready. You do not need to plot and contrive. Here are My hands; put your fetters on them.” He assumes what is the characteristic of His attitude during His sufferings, that no man has power over Him, but that He is voluntarily surrendering Himself. The soldiers that would take Him fall to the ground, and He might have departed,

but He waited, and let them lay hold on Him. It was not Roman nails that fastened Him to the Cross ; it was the “ cords of love ” that bound Him there. Throughout the whole of His Passion the same characteristics are prominent, and they are plain here.

But, beyond that, there is another point of view from which the words must be regarded. To Judas this commandment was equivalent to saying, “ Take your own way.” Jesus Christ left him to do what he would. Now brethren, the analogue to that, the thing which corresponds to it, in your experience and mine, is a condition to which, more or less completely, we are all exposed, and to which some of us have drawn very near, when we are conscious of no restraints of conscience, when nothing seems to pull us back from evil that we are inclined to do. I do not know that anybody ever comes to absolute and entire insensitiveness of conscience. I hope not. But many of us do come awfully near it, and all of us tend towards it in some directions. For I suppose we all know what it is to have faults, sins, to which we are so disposed and habituated as that there is very little, if any, conscious check or pull-back when we contemplate doing them again. It is an awful solitude into which a man comes then. With our own hands we pull up the buoys, and put out the light-houses, and pitch overboard the compass, and lash the helm, and go to sleep in our bunks—and what happens then ? Why, we are bumping on the black rocks, with half the ship’s

side torn to shivers, before we know where we are. So let us take care lest, by doing what Judas did, we get into the place where Judas stood, where conscience which is God's voice, and circumstances which are God's hand, shall no longer keep us back, and we shall wipe our mouths and say, “I have done no harm.”

Do not let us forget that the only man that Jesus Christ ever abandoned, if I may use the word, was an Apostle. And how did he come to that fatal position? As I tried to show you in the preceding sermon—by a very familiar road. He had been with Christ and neglected Him. He had listened to His teaching and ignored it. He had received the full flame of His love upon his heart, and it had not melted him. So he grew worse and worse until he came to this—“Do it quickly!”

But is not that which I have called, perhaps too strongly, abandoning—the letting of a man have his way—is not that a kind of appeal to him, too, and a seeking of him by the only way by which there is a chance of finding him? We all know that sometimes the best thing that can happen to a man is that he shall drink as he has brewed, that he shall be “filled with the fruit of his own devices,” that he shall be obliged to reap as he has sown, that if he will play with fire he shall be allowed to play with it, and find out, when he looks at his own scarred palms, what a fool he has been. God seeks us sometimes by letting us go, that we may learn by consequences that “it is an evil thing,” and a

“ bitter ” thing as well, to “ forsake the Lord our God.” “ Do it quickly,” and find out how rich you are, with thirty pieces of silver in your pocket, and a betrayed Master on your conscience. I say *that* was a kind of seeking, and that is the kind of seeking that some of us need, and that some of us get.

No man is so left as that return is impossible. No man is so left as that he cannot be forgiven. If Judas was lost, he was lost not because he betrayed his Master—for even that crime might have been washed away by the innocent blood which he betrayed—but because, having betrayed, he despaired. The denier “ went out and wept bitterly ; ” the betrayer “ went out and hanged himself.” If he had let remorse become repentance, as Peter did, he, too, like Peter, might have had a healing message from the risen Lord on the Easter morning. He, too, might have been forgiven and cleansed.

The Cross of Glory

Therefore, when he was gone out, Jesus said, Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him. If God be glorified in Him, God shall also glorify Him in Himself, and shall straightway glorify Him.—JOHN xiii. 31-2.

“**J**UDAS, having received the sop, went immediately out, and it was night.” Surely that is more than a note of time. Into the dark that dark soul went to do his dark work, and the Evangelist would have us note, how fit the time was for the deed. He connects the words of my text with the withdrawal of the betrayer by the significant clause, “*therefore*, when he was gone out, Jesus said.” The presence of the traitor had been a restraint, and when he was gone, the flow of speech was freer, as when some black rock that chokes the channel of a river is lifted out of the bed. Jesus too, knew the oppression of an uncongenial presence, and was more at ease when it was withdrawn. The traitor’s departure led to these great words in another way, too, for by his going out on his errand, the Cross was brought appreciably nearer, and

in the consciousness that the deed was as good as done, our Lord speaks now as if it were already past. "Now is the Son of Man glorified." That "now" not only points us to the occasion of His speaking thus, but it also points us to the fact that it was the Cross of which He was speaking. What Judas went out to do was the beginning of Jesus Christ's being glorified. They were strange words at such a time.

You note, of course, the threefold "glorifying" that is spoken of here, and the ring of triumph that is in the words. They tell us what Christ thought was glory, and they stain all the lustre of our poor, vulgar notions of what it is. They lift a corner of the veil, and show us what it was that drew Him, a not unwilling sacrifice, to the Cross. They ought to melt hearts into reverent love, and to mould lives into strenuous imitation. We take these three instances of "glorifying," which all cluster round that Cross, for our consideration now.

I. THE CROSS AS GLORIFYING CHRIST.

If we read such words as these in the biography of any martyr or hero of liberty or of truth, and found him welcoming death as the very crown of his life, they would live in men's memories, and be familiar on their lips. But Jesus speaks them, and even those that love Him best do not appreciate their deep significance. Let me try to work it out.

Now, if we look over this gospel, we find a very

distinct peculiarity in it, in that the point of view from which it looks at the death of Christ is the opposite of that which most of the New Testament writers take up. To them it is the very lowest point of His humiliation ; to this gospel it is the very apex of His elevation. And it was Himself that set the example of so speaking of it. For, if you remember, almost at the beginning of His career, according to the record of this Evangelist, He said to Nicodemus : “ Even so must the Son of Man be lifted up.” The elevation which was in His mind was not the foot or two above the earth to which the victim upon a cross was raised, but in that insignificant detail of a crucifixion, Jesus saw a symbol of His truly being lifted up, not merely to be conspicuous, like the brazen serpent on the pole, from which He drew the emblem, but to be truly exalted in the very moment of deepest shame. You will remember, too, that in a similar fashion He again used the very same phrase when He said, “ I, if I be lifted up ”—and only if—“ will draw all men unto me.” So this Evangelist, catching the spirit of His Lord’s words, and echoing their tone, speaks repeatedly of the Son of Man’s being glorified as a synonym for the Son of Man’s being crucified. I need not quote the instances ; they will recur to your memory. At all events, here is the fact, that to Jesus Christ Himself, looking on His approaching death, that Cross assumed, with swift alternation, two apparently opposite aspects. At one moment, as we

have seen in former sermons, He shrank from it as dark and grim, and in the next moment, as we see here in this ringing note of victory, He welcomes it as the very climax of all His career. Like some great pillar elevated on a mountain, when the thunder-clouds fill the sky, it stands out grim and dark, and then in a moment the strong wind sweeps them away, and the sunlight smites it, and it shines out white and lustrous. With such swift alternations, and almost a confluence of the two streams of feeling, to Jesus Christ the Cross was dark and the Cross was radiant. The lowest depth of His humiliation was the highest summit of His exaltation, so that not only, as one of the Apostles puts it, "He humbled Himself unto . . . the death of the Cross," and "therefore God hath highly exalted Him," but also "He humbled Himself unto the death of the Cross," and therein, as well as therefore, He is highly exalted. What, then, were the aspects of it as it presented itself to Him, which thus made Him recognize, in its ignominy and in its shame, in its pain and in its desolation, the loftiest point in His whole mission?

First, it was the supreme revelation of Himself, and for Him to be known is to be glorified. He had been filtering, as it were, His gracious gentleness, His utter self-surrender, His all-embracing pity, in drops of mercy and love and deeds of brotherhood and tenderness, through all His life; but what had been dropped was now being poured out in a full flood. Because He

therein was able to express utter pity, entire self-abandonment, love that shrank from no surrender for the sake of the beloved, therefore to Him the Cross, which thus revealed the infinitude of His tenderness, was His glorifying. One can fancy a mother bending over her child, and shrinking from no pain or suffering, if only the child could by it understand the infinite depths of the mother's heart. And so Christ says to Himself: "I die, and then they will understand how I loved them." That was His idea of what glory is,—entire self-surrender, able to express itself to the uttermost in the giving up of life, and so to steal into men's hearts.

Then, again, the thought that the Cross glorifies Jesus rests upon the fact that Jesus recognized His death as the forth-putting of the mightiest power that He was able to wield. If we take anything but the highest (let me, for simple convenience, use the word—the evangelical) conception of Christ's death, I understand not how it could ever appear to Him as being His victory, and the strongest of the weapons that He wielded. Rather, surely, it must have seemed to Him, as it might have seemed to a Socrates or a John Huss, His definitive defeat, and His joining the ranks of the great multitude that had tried to help men and had failed. There is only one notion of what Christ's death was and is, that seems to me to focus, so to speak, with these words of my text. If in it the Lamb of God

was taking away the sins of the world, then, and only then, as it seems to me, was it the climax of His work, and the very brightness of His glory. Mighty were His deeds of healing and of mercy, and mighty, with the might of gentleness, were His words of wisdom and penetrating rebuke. Mighty were the beams of radiance that streamed from His pure character, but mightiest of all are the forces which were brought into operation in humanity by that death which redeemed the world. This Samson slew more of the Philistine foes in His death than in His life ; and at the moment, when, apparently, He was most powerless and manacled, He took the gates of the prison-house on His strong shoulders and bore them away, and set the oppressed free. Christ's death is the store-house of His power. The greatest of all the deeds that He did, He did when He died.

That death is His glorifying, inasmuch as it is His one means of winning men's hearts. If you take it out of His work, you de-magnetize Jesus, and He has no longer the attractive power which draws all men unto Him. So, because of its being His perfect self-revelation, because of its being His most potent instrument, because of its being the secret of His charm to win men's hearts when its significance is rightly apprehended, He stood looking across the narrow cleft that separated Him from Calvary, and proclaimed : " Now is the Son of Man glorified."

Let me remind you, in one sentence, that He calls Himself here "the Son of Man." That Name means, whatever else it means, the realized ideal of humanity, and therefore the path that He trod is the path that we have to tread. "Glory"—let us understand what it is, not the vulgar thing that goes strutting about the world, and calls itself by that name. Flaunting sun-flowers and gaudy poppies are not so fair as the violet hiding below the stone, or as the pure white of the lily. If we seek for glory, let us learn that the highest glory is to forget self, and to surrender life for the blessing of others. That is the path by which Christ sought and found it, "leaving us an example that we should follow His steps."

Now turn to

II. THE SON AS GLORIFYING GOD.

"Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him." Does not that strike you as being the expression of a consciousness of union with God much more close than anything to which we can aspire? Does a *man's* virtue, however lustrous and radiant it may be, "glorify God," except in a roundabout fashion? But Jesus Christ here speaks as if His glorification was also, in a direct and immediate way, God's being glorified. Do the words not sound as if a world too wide for the facts, if Jesus was no more than one of ourselves, with no other or closer relation to God than the rest of us hold? To me I confess they cannot be

freed from the charge of exaggeration, unless we come to the old faith: "the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us; and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only Begotten of the Father."

But I pass on to fix rather upon this one other thought, that according to our Lord's own conception of what His death meant, the world is to find in it the very chiefest, most brilliant outshining of the uncreated light of God. Is not that a tremendous claim for a man to make? Stars and sun pale their light, all the magnificences and subtleties of creative energy dwindle into comparative insignificance; even the voice by which God proclaims Himself in the depth of men's hearts is hushed as into silence. For those who seek to attain the truest and the loftiest idea of God, there is but one course to take—to turn away from Creation, with its inconceivable magnitudes and as inconceivable minutenesses, suns and microbes, and from Providence with its perplexities, from the intuitions of our own hearts, and the monitions of our own consciences, and to turn to that Cross. A strange embodiment of Divine power, or Divine wisdom, but not a strange embodiment of the infinite seeking love of the Father God, is that weak Man, dying there in the dark. As we look, if we are wise, we shall cry out with the prophet, though with a new application of his words: "Lo! this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us." God is glorified in Him, for in Him.

and in His death rightly apprehended, there is a revelation of far more than the physical attributes, which are mainly the opposite of human limitations, and the transcendence of human conceptions. There is more than merely the attributes which declare purity of moral nature or righteousness of administration—these are the fringes of the brightness, but the central heart of it is the great message of the Cross, God is love. “He commendeth His love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

And so I come to the last of these three-fold glorifyings—

III. THE FATHER AS GLORIFYING THE SON:

“He will glorify Him in Himself, and will straightway glorify Him.” I cannot deal adequately with the great, though dim, thoughts which emerge from that utterance, but let me just suggest them to you very briefly. “God will glorify Him in Himself;”—take, for commentary another word of Christ’s in that great intercessory prayer where He prays: “Glorify me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was,” and again, when in language which singularly blends petition and authority, He asks: “I will that they also whom Thou hast given Me be with me . . . that they may behold My glory, which thou hast given me.” Who can add anything to these words? Our comments would but weaken them, and our speech would sound thin and harsh in contrast

with their mighty music, as a shepherd's reed is to the deep notes of a great organ. I only venture to put beside them another word from this Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God," and I beseech you to ponder on these great sayings. May they help us all to understand Who it was that went to His death, and what it was that His death did!

But then, notice further how here we get, in the very language of my text, a wonderful thought added to that of "the glory before the world was." For it is "the Son of Man" that is to be "glorified by the Father," and that means that the Jesus Who dwelt amongst men, our elder Brother, the bearer of our nature, is now "the first Begotten from the dead, and the Prince of all the kings of the earth," and "sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty." What the shekinah-cloud signified when it received into its lustrous folds the ascending Christ, and hid Him from the gaze of His disciples, was just that Man was encompassed with the radiance of God.

So, brethren, this vision of "the glory that should follow" united with His love and His pity to draw Jesus, with the whole consent of His heart, to the Cross, because through the gloom that wrapped it, He saw the light of the glory beyond. In like manner, since it is as the Son of man that He is glorified, if we follow Him, if we, too, count our glory to be utter

self-surrender, if we are magnetized by the attraction of His Cross, if we yield to Him as thereby enthroned King of men, if we seek in our daily lives to glorify Him, and God through Him, then we, too, will be permitted, as is said of one of the Apostles, by our manner of death to glorify God, and we, too, are entitled, not indeed to make the glory that shall follow our supreme motive or impulse to lives of holiness and Christian service, but to encourage ourselves, in the midst of our difficulties, and to brace ourselves for any cross that may lie before us, by having respect unto the Crown that is beyond the Cross.

If we take Christ for the glory of our lives, and use our lives for the glory of Christ, then we may humbly believe that the glory which the Father gave to Him, He, according to His own promise, will give to us, and that we shall sit down with Him on His throne, even as He overcame, and is set down with the Father on His throne.

Cannot and Can

Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek Me ; and as I said unto the Jews, whither I go ye cannot come ; so now say to you.—**JOHN** xiii. 33.

WE have seen, in previous sermons on the preceding context, how large and black the Cross loomed before Jesus now, and how radiant the glory beyond shone out to Him. But it was only for a moment that either of these two absorbed His thoughts ; and with wonderful self-forgetfulness and self-command, He turned away at once from the consideration of how the near future was to affect Him, to the thought of how it was to affect the handful of helpless disciples who had to be left alone. Impending separation breaks up the fountains of the heart, and we all know the instinct that desires to crowd all the often hidden love into some one last token. So here our Lord addresses His disciples by a name that is never used except this once, “little children,” a fond diminutive that not only reveals an unusual depth of tender emotion, but also breathes a

pitying sense of their defencelessness when they are to be left alone. So might a dying mother look at her little ones.

But the words that follow, at first sight, are dark with the sense of a final and complete separation. "Ye shall seek Me"—and not only so, but He seems to put back His humble friends into the same place as had been occupied by His bitter foes—"as I said to the Jews, whither I go ye cannot come; so now I say to you." There was something that prevented both classes alike from keeping Him company; and He had to walk His path both into the darkness and into the glory, alone.

The words apply in their fulness only to the parenthesis of time whilst He lay in the grave, and the disciples despairingly thought that all was ended. It was a brief period; it was a revolutionary moment; and though it was soon to end, they needed to be guarded against it. But though the words do not apply to the permanent relation between the glorified Christ and us, His disciples, yet partly by similarity, and still more by contrast, they do suggest great Christian thoughts, great Christian blessednesses, and imperative Christian duties. These gather themselves mainly round two contrasts, a transitory "cannot" soon to be changed into a permanent "can"; and a momentary seeking, soon to be converted into a blessed seeking which finds. I now deal only with the former.

We have here a transitory "cannot" soon to be changed into a permanent "can."

"Whither I go ye cannot come." Does not one hear a tone of personal sorrow in that saying? Jesus had always hungered for understanding and sympathetic companions, and one of His life-long sorrows had been His utter loneliness; but He had never, all the long time that He had been with them, so put out His hand, feeling for some warm clasp, of a human hand to help Him in His struggle, as He did during the hours terminating with Gethsemane. And perhaps we may venture to say that we hear in this utterance an expression of Christ's sorrow for Himself that He had to tread the dark way, and to pass into the brightness beyond, all alone. He yearned for the impossible human companionship, as well as sorrowed for the imperfections which made it impossible.

Why was it that they could not "follow Him now"? The answer to that question is found in the consideration of whither it was that He went. When that bright Shekinah-cloud at the Ascension received Him into its radiant folds, it showed "why they could not follow Him," because it revealed that He went unto the Father, when He left the world. So we are brought face to face with the old, solemn thought that character makes capacity for heaven. "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord, or who shall stand in His holy place?" asked the Psalmist; and a prophet put the question in a still sharper form, and by the very form of the question

suggested a negative answer—"Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire ; who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings ? " Who can pass into that Presence, and stand near God, without being, like the maiden in the old legend, shrivelled into ashes by the contact of the celestial fire ? "Holiness" is that "without which no man shall see the Lord." And we, all of us, in the depths of our own hearts, if we rightly understand the voices that ever echo there, must feel that the condition which is, obviously and without any need for arguing it, required for abiding with God, and so going into the glory where Christ is, is a condition which none of us can fulfil. In that respect the imperfect and immature friends, the little children, the babes who loved and yet knew not Him Whom they loved, and the scowling enemies, were at one. For they had all of them the one human heart, and in that heart the deep-lying alienation and contrariety to God. Therefore Christ alone trod the winepress, and alone "ascended up where He was before."

But let us remember that this "cannot" was only a transitory cannot. For we must underscore very deeply that word in my text "*so now* I say to you," and a moment afterwards, when one of the Apostles puts the question : "Why cannot I follow Thee now ? " the answer is : "Thou canst not follow Me now ; but thou shalt follow Me afterwards." The text, too, is succeeded immediately by the wonderful parting con-

solutions and counsels spoken to the disciples, through all of which there gleams the promise that they will be with Him where He is, and behold His glory. Set side by side with these sad words of our Lord in the text, by which He unloosed their clasping hands from Him, and turned His face to His solitary path, the triumphant language in which habitually the rest of the New Testament speaks of the Christian man's relation to Christ. Think of that great passage: "Ye are come unto the city of God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to God the Judge of all, and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant." What has become of the impossibility? Vanished. Where is the "cannot?" Turned into a blessed "can"? And so Apostles have no scruple in saying, "Our citizenship is in Heaven," nor in saying, "We sit together with Him in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." The path that was blocked is open. The incapacity that towered up like a great, black wall has melted away; and the path into the holiest of all is made patent by the blood of Christ. For in that death there lies the power that sweeps away all the impediments of man's sin, and in that life of the risen, glorified, indwelling Christ there lies the power which cleanses the inmost heart from "all filthiness of flesh and spirit," and makes it possible for our mortal feet to walk on the immortal path, and for us, with all our unworthiness, with all our shrinking, to stand in His presence and not be ashamed or consumed. "Ye cannot come" was

true for a few days. "Ye can come" is true for ever ; and for all Christian men.

But let us not forget that the one attitude of heart and mind, by which a poor, sinful man, who dare not draw near to God, receives into himself the merit and power of the death, and the indwelling power of the life, of Jesus Christ, is personal faith in Jesus Christ. To trust Him is to come to Him, and it is represented in Scripture as conferring an instantaneous fitness for access to God. People pray sometimes that they may be made "meet for the inheritance of the saints in light," and the prayer is, in a sense, wise and true. But they too often forget that the apostle says, in the original connexion of the words which they so quote : "He *hath* translated us from the tyranny of the darkness, and *hath* made us meet for the inheritance of the saints in light." That is to say, whenever a poor soul, compassed and laden with its infirmity and sin, turns itself to that Lord Whose Cross conquers sin, and Whose blood infused into our veins—the spirit of whose life granted to us—gives us to partake of His own righteousness, that moment that soul can tread the path that brings into the presence of God, and "has access with confidence by the faith of Him." So, brethren, seeing that thus the incapacity may all be swept away, and that instead of a "cannot," which relegates us to darkness, we may receive a "can" which leads us into the light, let us see to it that this communion, which is possible for all

Christian men, is real in our cases, and that we use the access which is given to us, and dwell for ever in, and with, the Lord.

I have said that the act of faith, by associating a man with Jesus Christ in the power of His death and of His life, makes any who exercise it capable of passing into the presence of God. But I would remind you, too, that to make us more fit for more full and habitual communion is the very purpose for which all the discipline of our earthly life, its sorrows and its joys, its tasks and its repose, is exercised upon us—"He for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness." Surely, if we habitually took that point of view in reference to our work, in reference to our joys, in reference to our trials, everything would be different. We are being prepared with sedulous love, with patient reiteration of line upon line, precept upon precept, with singularly varied methods but a uniform purpose, by all that meets us in life, to be more capable of treading the eternal path into the eternal light. Is that how we daily think of our own circumstances? Do we bring that great thought to bear upon all that we, sometimes faithlessly, call mysterious or murmuringly think of—if we dare not speak our thought—as being cruel and hard? What does it matter if some precious things be lifted off our shoulders, and out of our hearts, if their being taken away makes it more possible for us to tread with a lighter step the path of peace? What

matters it though many things that we would fain keep are withdrawn from us, if by the withdrawal we are sent a little further forward on the road that leads to God ? As George Herbert says, sorrows and joys are like battle-dores that drive a shuttlecock, and they may all "toss us to Thy breast." In faith, however infantile it may be, there is an undeveloped capacity, a germ of fitness, for dwelling with God. But that capacity is meant to be increased, and the little children are meant to be helped to grow up into full-grown men, "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ," by all that comes to them here on earth. Do you not think we should understand life better, do you not think it would all be flashed up into new radiance, do you not think we should more seldom stand bewildered at what we choose to call the inscrutable dispensations of Providence, if *this* were the point of view from which we looked at them all—that they were fitting us for perpetual abiding with our Father God ?

Nor let us forget that there was a transient "cannot" of another sort. For "flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God." So, as life is changed when we think of it as helping us toward Him, death is changed when we think of it as being, if I may so say, the usher in attendance on the Presence-chamber, who draws back the thin curtain that separates us from the Throne, and takes us by the hands and leads us into the Presence. Surely if we habitually thought thus of that

otherwise grim chamberlain, we should be willing to put our hands into his, as a little child will, when straying, into the hands of a stranger who says, "Come with me and I will take you home to your father." "As I said unto the Jews . . . so now I say to you, whither I go, ye cannot come."

Let us press on you and on myself the one thought that comes out of all that I have been saying, the blessed possibility, which, because it is a possibility, is an obligation, to use far more than most of us do, the right of access to the King Who is our Father. There are nobles and corporate bodies, who regard it as one of their chief distinctions that they have always the right of *entrée* to the Court of the Sovereign. Every Christian man has that. And in old days, when a baron did not show himself at Court, suspicion naturally arose, and he was in danger of being thought disaffected, if not traitorous. Ah! if you and I were judged according to that law, what would become of us? We can go when we like. How seldom we do go! We can live in the heavens whilst our work lies down here. We prefer the low earth to the lofty sky. "We are come"—ideally, and in the depths of our nature, our affinities are there—"unto God, the Judge of all, and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant." Are we come? Are we day by day, in all the pettiness of our ordinary lives, when compassed by hard duties, weighed upon by sore distress—still keeping our hearts in Heaven, and

our feet familiar with the path that leads us to God ?
“Set your affections on things above, where Jesus is, sitting at the right hand of God.” For there is no “cannot ” for His servants in regard to their access to any place where He is.

Seeking Jesus

Ye shall seek Me.—JOHN xiii. 33.

IN the former sermon on this verse I pointed out that it, in its fulness, applies only to the brief period between the Crucifixion and the Resurrection, but that, partly by contrast and partly by analogy, it suggests permanent relations between Christ and His disciples. These relations were mainly—as I pointed out then—two: there was that one expressed by the subsequent words of the verse, “Whither I go, ye cannot come”—a brief “cannot,” soon to be changed into a permanent “can”; and there was a second, a brief, sad, and vain seeking, soon to be changed into a seeking which finds. It is to the latter that I wish to turn now.

“Ye shall seek Me” fell, like the clods on a coffin-lid, with a hollow sound on the hearts of the Apostles. It comes to us as a permission, and a command, and a promise. I do not dwell on that sad seeking, which was so brief but so bitter. We all know what it is to put out an empty hand into the darkness and the void,

and to grope for a touch which we know, whilst we grope, that we shall not find. And these poor helpless disciples, by their forlorn sense of separation, by their yearning that brought no satisfaction, by their very listless despair, were saying, during these hours of agony into which an eternity of pain was condensed, "Oh! that He were beside us again!"

That sad seeking ended when He came to them, and "then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord." But another kind of seeking began, when the cloud received Him out of their sight; as joyful as the other was laden with sorrow, as sure to find the object of its quest as the other was certain to be disappointed. What He said in the darkness to them, He says in the light to us: What I say unto you I say unto all, *Seek!* So now we have to deal with that joyful search which is sure of finding its object, and is only a little, if at all, less blessed than the finding itself.

1.—EVERY CHRISTIAN IS, BY HIS VERY NAME, A SEEKER
AFTER CHRIST.

There are two kinds of seeking, one like that of a bird whose young have been stolen away, which flutters here and there, because it knows not where that is which it seeks; another, like the flight of the same bird, when the migrating instinct rises in its little breast, and straight as an arrow it goes, not because it knows not its goal, but because it knows it, yonder where the sun is warm and the sky is blue, and winter is left behind in

the cold North. "Ye shall seek Me" is the word of promise, which changes the vain search that is ignorant of where the object of its quest is, into a blessed going out of the heart towards that which it knows to be the home of its homelessness. Thus the text brings out the very central blessedness and peculiarity of the Christian life, that it has no uncertainty in its aims, and that, instead of seeking for things which may or may not be found, or if found may or may not prove to be what we dreamt them to be, it seeks for a Person Whom it knows where to find, and of Whom it knows that all its desires will be met in Him. We have, then, on the one side the multifarious, divergent searchings of man; and on the other side the one quest in which all these others are gathered up, and translated into blessedness—the seeking after Jesus Christ.

Men know that they need, if I may so put it, four things: truth for the understanding, love round which the heart may coil, authority for the will which may direct and restrain, and energy for the practical life. But, apart from the quest after Christ, men for the most part seek these necessary goods in divers objects, and fragmentarily look for the completion of their desires. But fragments will never satisfy a man's soul, and they who have to go to one place for truth, and to another for love, and to another for authority, and to another for energy, are wofully likely never to find what they search for. They are seeking in the Manifold what can be

found only in the One. It is as if some vessel, full of precious stones, were thrown down before men, and whilst they are racing after the diamonds, they lose the emeralds and the sapphires. But the wise concentrate their seekings on the one Pearl of great price, in Whom is truth for the brain, love for the heart, authority for the will, power for the life, and all summed in that which is more blessed than all, the Person of the Brother Who died for us, the Christ Who lives to fill our hearts for ever. One sun dims all the stars ; and the " one entire and perfect Chrysolite " beggars and reduces to fragments " all the precious things that thou canst desire."

To seek Him is the very hall-mark of a Christian, and that seeking comes to be an earnest desire and effort after more conscious communion with Him, and a more entire possession of His imparted life which is righteousness and peace and joy and power. According to the Rabbis, the manna tasted to each man what each man most desired. The manifoldness of the one Christ is far more manifold than the manifoldness of the multiplicity of fragmentary and partial aims which foolish men perceive.

The ways of seeking are very plain. First of all, we seek if, and in proportion as, we do make the effort to occupy our thoughts and minds, not with theological dogmas, but with the living Christ Himself. Ah ! brethren, it is hard to do, and I daresay a great many of you are thinking that it is far harder for you, in the

distractions and rush and conflict of business and daily life, than it is for people like me, whom you think of as sitting in a study, with nothing to distract us. I do not know about that; I fancy it is about equally hard for us all; but it is possible. I have been in Alpine villages where, at the end of every squalid alley, there towered up a great, pure, silent, white peak. That is what our lives may be: however noisome, crowded, petty the little lane in which we live, the Alp is at the end of it there, if we only choose to lift our eyes and look. It is possible that not only "into the sessions of sweet, silent thought," but into the rush and bustle of the workshop or the exchange, there may come, like "some sweet, beguiling melody, so sweet we know not we are listening to it," the thought that changes pettiness into greatness, that makes all things go smoothly and easily, that is a test and a charm to discover and to destroy temptation, the thought of a present Christ, the Lover of my soul, and the Helper of my life.

Again, we seek Him when, by aspiration and desire, we bring Him—as He is always brought thereby—into our hearts and into our lives. The measure of our desire is the measure of our possession. Wishing is the opening of our hearts, but, alas! often we wish and desire, and the heart opens and nothing enters. Wishes are like the tentacles of some marine organism waving about in a waste ocean, feeling for the food that it does not find. But if we open our hearts for Him, that is simul-

taneous with the coming of Him to us. "Ye have not, because ye ask not." Do not forget, dear friends, that desire, if it is genuine, will take a very concrete form and will be prayer. And it is prayer—by which I do not mean the utterance of words without desire, any more than I mean desire without the direct casting of it into the form of supplication—it is prayer that brings Christ into any, and it is prayer that will bring Him into every, life.

Nor let us forget that there is another way of seeking besides these two, of looking up to Him through, and in the midst of, all the shows and trifles of this low life, and the reaching out of our desires towards Him, as the roots of a tree beneath the soil go straight for the river. That other way is imitation and obedience. It is vain to think of Him, and it is unreal to pretend to desire Him, if we are not seeking Him by treading in the path that He has trod, and which leads to Him. Imitation and obedience—these are the steps by which we go straight through all the trivialities of life into the presence of the Lord Himself. The smallest deflection from the path that leads to Him will carry us away into doleful wastes. The least invisible cloud that steals across the sky will blot out half a hemisphere of stars ; and we seek not Christ unless, thinking of Him, and desiring Him, we also walk in the path in which He has walked, and so come where He is. He Himself has said that if His servant follows Him, where He is, there shall

also His servant be. These things make up the seeking which ought to mark us all.

I note that

II.—THE CHRISTIAN SEEKER ALWAYS FINDS.

I pointed out in my last sermon the strange identity of our Lord's words to His humble friends, with those which on another occasion He used to His bitter enemies. He reminds the disciples of that identity in the verse from which my text comes: "As I said to the Jews . . . so now I say to you." But there was one thing that He said to the Jews that He did not say to them. To the former He said, "Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me"; and He did not say that—even for the sad hours it was not quite true—He did not say that to His followers, and He does not say it to us.

If we seek we shall find. There is no disappointment in the Christian life. Anything is possible rather than that a man should desire Christ and not have Him. That has never been the experience of any seeking soul. And so I urge upon you what has already been suggested, that inasmuch as, by reason of His infinite longing to give truth and love and guidance and energy and His whole Self, to all of us, the amount of our possession of the power and life of Jesus Christ depends on ourselves. If you take to the fountain a tiny cup, you will only bring away a tiny cup-full. If you take a great vessel you will bring *it* away full. As long as the woman in the old story held out her vessel to the miraculous flow

of the oil, the flow continued. When she had no more vessels to take, the flow stopped. If a man holds a flagon beneath a spigot, with an unsteady hand, half of the precious liquor will be spilt on the ground. Those who fulfil the conditions, of which I have already been speaking, may make quite sure that according to their faith will it be unto them. And if you, dear friend, have not in your experience the conscious presence of a Christ Who is all that you need, there is no one in heaven or earth or hell to blame for it but only your own self. "I have never said to any of the seed of Jacob, Seek ye My face in vain," and when the Lord said, "Ye shall seek Me," He was implicitly binding Himself to meet the seeking soul, and give Himself to the desiring heart.

Remember, too, that this seeking, which is always crowned with finding, is the only search in which failure is impossible. There is only one course of life that has no disappointments. We all know how frequently we are foiled in our quests; we all know how often a prize won is a bitterer disappointment than a prize unattained. Like a jelly-fish in the water, as long as it is there its tenuous substance is lovely, expanded, tinged with delicate violets and blues, and its long filaments float in lines of beauty. Lay it on the beach, and it is a shapeless lump, and it poisons and stings. You fish your prize out of the great ocean, and when you have it, does it disappoint, or does it fulfil, the raised expectations of the quest?

There is One that does not disappoint. There is one gold mine that comes up to the prospectus. There is one spring that never runs dry. The more deep our Christian experience is, the more we shall take the rapturous exclamation of the Arabian queen to ourselves : " The half was not told us."

And so, lastly, I suggest that—

III.—THE FINDING IMPELS TO FRESH SEEKING.

The object of the Christian man's quest is Jesus Christ. He is Incarnate Infinitude ; and that cannot be exhausted. The seeker after Jesus Christ is the Christian soul. That soul is the incarnate possibility of indefinite expansion and approximation and assimilation ; and that cannot be exhausted. And so, with a Christ who is infinite, and a seeker whose capacities may be indefinitely expanded, there can be no satiety, there can be no limit, there can be no end to the process. This wine-skin will not burst when the new wine is put into it. Rather like some elastic vessel, as you pour it will fill out and expand. Possession enlarges, and the more of Christ's fulness is poured into a human heart, the more is that heart widened out to receive a greater blessing.

Dear brethren, there is one course of life, and I believe but one, on which we may all enter with the sure confidence that in the nature of things, in the nature of Christ and in the nature of ourselves, there is no end to growth and progress. Think of the freshness and blessed-

ness and energy that puts into a life. To have an unattained and unattainable object, a goal to which we can never come, but to which we may ever be approximating, seems to me to be the secret of perpetual joy and of perpetual youthfulness. To say, "forgetting the things that are behind, I reach forward unto the things that are before," is a charm and an amulet that repels monotony and weariness, and goes with a man to the very end, and when all other aims and objects have died down into grey ashes, that flame, like the fabled lamp in Virgil's tomb, burns clear in the grave, and lights us to the Eternity beyond.

For certainly, if there be neither satiety nor limit to Christian progress here, there can be no better and stronger evidence that Christian progress here is but the first "lap" of the race, the first *stadium* of the course, and that beyond that narrow, dark line that lies across the path, it runs on, rising higher, and will run on for ever.

"On earth the broken arcs; in heaven the perfect round."

Seek for what you are sure to find; seek for what will never disappoint you; seek for what will abide with you for ever. The very first word of Christ's recorded in Scripture is a question which He puts to us all: "*What seek ye?*" Well for us if, like the two to whom it was originally addressed, we answer, "We are not seeking a What; we are seeking a Whom.—Master, where

dwellest Thou ? ” And if we have that answer in our hearts, we shall receive the invitation which they received, “ Come and see,”—come and seek. “ Ye shall seek Me ” is a gracious invitation, an imperative command, and a faithful promise that, if we seek we shall find. “ Whoso findeth *Him* findeth life ; whoso misseth *Him* ”—whatever else he has sought and found —“ wrongeth his own soul.”

“ As I have Loved ”

A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another ; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another.
--JOHN xiii. 34, 35.

WISHES from dying lips are sacred. They sink deep into memories and mould faithful lives. The sense of impending separation had added an unwonted tenderness to our Lord's address, and He had designated His disciples by the fond name of " little children." The same sense here gives authority to His words, and moulds them into the shape of a command. The disciples had held together because He was in their midst. Will the arch stand when the keystone is struck out ? Will not the spokes fall asunder when the nave of the wheel is taken away ? He would guard them from the disintegrating tendencies that were sure to set in when He was gone ; and He would point them to a solace for His absence, and to a kind of substitute for His presence. For to love the brethren whom they see would be, in some sense, a continuing to love the Christ whom they had ceased to see. And so, immedi-

ately after He said : “ Whither I go ye cannot come,” He goes on to say : “ Love one another as I have loved you.”

He called this a “ new commandment,” though to love one’s neighbour as one’s self was a familiar commonplace amongst the Jews, and had a recognized position in Rabbinical teaching. But His commandment proposed a new object of love, it set forth a new measure of love, so greatly different from all that had preceded it as to become almost a new kind of love, and it suggested and supplied a new motive power for love. This commandment “ could give life ” and fulfil itself. Therefore it comes to us as a “ new commandment ”—even to us—and, unlike the words which preceded it, which we were considering in former sermons, it is wholly and freshly applicable to-day as in the ages that are passed. I ask you, first, to consider—

I.—THE NEW SCOPE OF THE NEW COMMANDMENT.

“ Love one another.” The newness of the precept is realized, if we think for a moment of the new phenomenon which obedience to it produced. When the words were spoken, the then-known civilized Western world was cleft by great, deep gulfs of separation, like the crevasses in a glacier, by the side of which our racial animosities and class differences are merely superficial cracks on the surface. Language, religion, national animosities, differences of condition, and saddest of all, difference of sex, split the world up into

alien fragments. A "stranger" and an "enemy" were expressed in one language, by the same word. The learned and the unlearned, the slave and his master, the barbarian and the Greek, the man and the woman, stood on opposite sides of the gulfs, flinging hostility across. A Jewish peasant wandered up and down for three years in His own little country, which was the very focus of narrowness and separation and hostility, as the Roman historian felt when he called the Jews the "haters of the human race"; He gathered a few disciples, and he was crucified by a contemptuous Roman governor, who thought that the life of one fanatical Jew was a little price to pay for popularity with his troublesome subjects, and in a generation after, the clefts were being bridged, and all over the empire a strange new sense of unity was being breathed, and Barbarian, Scythian, bond and free, male and female, Jew and Greek, learned and ignorant, clasped hands and sat down at one table, and felt themselves all one in Christ Jesus. They were ready to break all other bonds, and to yield to the uniting forces that streamed out from His Cross. There never had been anything like it. No wonder that the world began to babble about sorcery, and conspiracies, and complicity in unnameable vices. It was only that the disciples were obeying the "new commandment," and a new thing had come into the world—a community held together by love and not by geographical accidents or linguistic affinities, or the iron

fetters of the conqueror. You sow the seed in furrows separated by ridges, and the ground is seamed, but when the seed springs the ridges are hidden, no division appears, and as far as the eye can reach, the cornfield stretches, rippling in unbroken waves of gold. The new commandment made a new thing, and the world wondered.

Now then, brethren, do not let us forget that, although it is in some respects a great deal harder to-day than it was then, to obey this commandment, the diverse circumstances in which Christian individuals and Christian communities are this day placed may modify the form of our obedience, but do not in the smallest degree weaken the obligation, for the individual Christian and for the societies of Christians, to follow this commandment. The multiplication of numbers, the cessation of the armed hostility of the world, the great varieties in intellectual position in regard to the truths of Christianity, divergencies of culture, and many other things, are separating forces. But our Christianity is worth very little, if it cannot master these separating tendencies, even as in the early days of freshness, the Christianity that sprang in these new converts' minds mastered the far more powerful separating tendencies with which they had to contend.

Every Christian man is under the obligation to recognize his kindred with every other Christian man—his kindred in the deep foundations of his spiritual being,

which are far deeper, and ought to be far more operative in drawing together, than the superficial differences of culture or opinion or the like, which may part us. The bond that holds Christian men together is their common relation to the one Lord, and that ought to influence their attitude to one another. You say I am talking commonplaces. Yes ; and the condition of Christianity this day is the sad and tragical sign that the commonplaces need to be talked about, till they are rubbed into the conscience of the Church as they never have been before.

Do not let us suppose that Christian love is mere sentiment. I shall have to speak a word or two about that presently, but I would fain lift the whole subject, if I can, out of the region of mere unctuous words, and gush of half-feigned emotion, which mean nothing, and would make you feel that it is a very practical commandment, gripping us hard, when our Lord says to us, “ Love one another.”

I have spoken about the accidental conditions which make obedience to this commandment difficult. The real reason which makes the obedience to it difficult is the slackness of our own hold on the centre. In the measure in which we are filled with Jesus Christ, in that measure will that expression of His Spirit and His life become natural to us. Every Christian has affinities with every other Christian, in the depths of his being, so as that he is a great deal more like his brother, who is

possessor of “like precious faith,” however unlike the two may be in outlook, in idiosyncrasy, and culture and in creed, than he is to another man with whom he may have a far closer sympathy in all these matters than he has with the brother in question, but from whom he is parted by this, that the one trusts and loves and obeys Jesus Christ, and the other does not. So, for individual and for churches, the commandment takes this shape—Go down to the depths and you will find that you are closer to the Christian man or community which seems furthest from you, than you are to the non-Christian who seems nearest to you. Therefore, let your love follow your kinship, and your heart recognize the oneness that knits you together. That is a revolutionary commandment; what would become of our present organizations of Christianity if it were obeyed? That is a revolutionary commandment; what would become of our individual relations to the whole family who, in every place, and in many tongues, and with many creeds, call on Jesus as on their Lord—their Lord and ours? I leave you to answer the question. Only, I say the commandment has for its first scope all who, in every place, love the Lord Jesus Christ.

But there is more than that involved in it. The very same principle which makes this love to one another imperative upon all disciples makes it equally imperative upon every follower of Jesus Christ to embrace in a real affection all whom Jesus so loved as to die for them.

If I am to love a Christian man because he and I love Christ, I am to love everybody, because Christ loves me and everybody, and because He died on the Cross for me and for all men. And so one of the other Apostles, or, at least, the letter which goes by his name, laid hold on the true connexion when, instead of concentrating Christian affection on the Church, and letting the world go to the devil as an alien thing, he said : “ Add to your faith,” this, that, and the other, and “ brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness, charity.” The particular does not exclude the general, it leads to the general. The fire kindled upon the hearth gives warmth to all the chamber. The circles are concentric, and the widest sweep is struck from the same middle point as the narrow. So the new commandment does not cut humanity in two halves, but gathers all diversity into one, and spreads the great reconciling of Christian love over all the antagonisms and oppositions of earth. Let me ask you to notice

II.—THE EXAMPLE OF THE NEW COMMANDMENT;
“ As I have loved you.”

That solemn “ as ” lifts itself up before us, shines far ahead of us, ought to draw us to itself in hope, and not to repel us from itself in despair. “ As I have loved ”—what a tremendous thing for a man to stand up before his fellows, and say, “ Take Me as the perfect Example of perfect love ; and let My example—undimmed by the mists of gathering centuries, and unweakened by the

change of condition, and circumstance, fresh as ever after ages have passed, and closely-fitting as ever in all varieties of human character and condition—stand before you ; the ideal that I have realized, and that you will be blessed in the proportion that you seek, though you fail to realize it ! ” There is, I venture to believe, only one aspect of Jesus Christ in which such a setting forth of Himself as the perfect Incarnation of perfect love is warrantable ; and that is found in the old belief that His very birth was the result of His love, and that His death was the climax of that love. And if so, we have to turn to Bethlehem, and the whole life, and the Cross at its end, as being the Christ-given example and model for our love to our brethren.

What do we see there ? I have said that there is too much of mere sickly sentimentality about the ordinary treatment of this great commandment, and that I desired to lift it out of that region into a far nobler, more strenuous, and difficult one. This is what we see in that life and in that death :—First of all—the activity of love—“ Let us not love in words, but in deed and in truth.” Then we see the self-forgetfulness of love—“ Even Christ pleased not Himself.” Then we see the self-sacrifice of love—“ Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” And in these three points, on which I would fain enlarge if I might, active love, self-oblivious love, self-sacrificing love, you have the pattern set for us all. Christian

love is no mere sickly maiden, full of sentimental emotions and honeyed words. She is a strenuous virgin, girt for service, a heroine ready for dangers, and prepared to be a martyr if it be needful. Love's language is sacrifice. “ I give Thee myself,” is its motto. And that is the pattern that is set before us all—“ as I have loved you.”

I have tried to show you how the commandment was new in many particulars, and it is for ever new in this particular, that it is for ever before us, unattained, and drawing faithful hearts to itself, and ever opening out into new heroisms, and, therefore, blessedness, of self-sacrifice, and ever leading us to confess the differences, deep, tragic, sinful, between us and Him Who—we sometimes think too presumptuously—we venture to say is our Lord and Master.

Did you ever see in some great picture gallery a copyist sitting in front of a Raffaele, and comparing his poor feeble daub, all out of drawing, and with little of the Divine beauty that the master had breathed over his canvas, even if it preserved the mere mechanical outline ? That is what you and I should do with our lives : take them and put them down side by side with the original. We shall have to do it some day. Had we better not do it now, and try to bring the copy a little nearer to the masterpiece ; and let that “ as I have loved you ” shine before us and draw us on to unattainable heights ?

And now, lastly, we have here

III. THE MOTIVE-POWER FOR OBEDIENCE TO THE COMMANDMENT.

And that is as new as all the rest. That “as” expresses the manner of the love, but it also expresses the motive and the power. It might be translated into the equivalent “in the fashion in which,” or it might be translated into the equivalent “since—” “I have loved you.” The original might bear the rendering, “that ye also *may* love one another.” That is to say, what keeps men from obeying this commandment is the instinctive self-regard which is natural to us all. There are muscles in the body which are so constructed that they close tightly; and the heart is something like one of these sphincter muscles—it shuts by nature, especially if there has been anything put inside it over which it can shut and keep it all to itself. But there is one thing that dethrones Self, and enthrones the angel Love in a heart, and that is—that into that heart there shall come surging the sense of the great love wherewith “I have loved you.” That melts the iceberg, nothing else will.

That love of Christ to us, received into our hearts, and there producing an answering love to Him, will make us, in the measure in which we live in it and let it rule us, love everything and every person that He loves. That love of Jesus Christ, stealing into our hearts and there sweetening the ever-springing “issues of life,” will make them flow out in glad obedience to any commandment

of His. That love of Jesus Christ, received into our hearts, and responded to by our answering love, will work, as love always does, a magical transformation. A great monastic teacher wrote his precious book about “The Imitation of Christ.” “Imitation” is a great word, Transformation is a greater. “We all,” receiving on the mirror of our loving hearts the love of Jesus Christ, “are changed into the same likeness.” Thus, then, the love, which is our pattern, is also our motive and our power for obedience, and the more we bring ourselves under its influences, the more we shall love all those who are beloved by, and lovers of, Jesus.

That is the one foundation for a world knit together in the bonds of amity and concord. There have been attempts at brotherhood, and the guillotine has ended what was begun in the name of “fraternity.” Men build towers, but there is no cement between the bricks, unless the love of Christ holds them together ; and therefore Babel after Babel comes down about the ears of its builders. But notwithstanding all that is dark to-day, and though the war-clouds are lowering, and the hearts of men are inflamed with fierce passions, Christ’s commandment is Christ’s promise ; and though the vision tarry, it will surely come. So even to-day Christian men ought to stand for Christ’s peace, and for Christ’s love. The old commandment which we have had from the beginning, is the new commandment that fits to-day as it fits all the ages. It is a dream, say

some. Yes, a dream ; but a morning dream which comes true. Let us do the little we can to make it true, and to bring about the day when the flock of men will gather round the one Shepherd, Who loved them to the death, and Who has bid them and helped them, to “ love one another as ”—and since—“ He has loved them.”

“ Why Cannot I Follow Thee Now ”

Peter said unto Him, Lord, why cannot I follow Thee now ? I will lay down my life for Thy sake. Jesus answered him, Wilt thou lay down thy life for My sake ? Verily, verily I say unto thee, The cock shall not crow till thou hast denied Me thrice.—JOHN xiii. 37, 38.

PETER'S main characteristics are all in operation here ; his eagerness to be in the front, his habit of blurting out his thoughts and feelings, his passionate love for his Master, and withal his inability to understand Him, and his self-confident arrogance. He has broken in upon Christ's solemn words, entirely deaf to their deep meaning, but blindly and blunderingly laying hold of one thought only, that Jesus is departing, and that he is to be left alone. So he asks the question, “ Lord ! Whither goest Thou ? ”—not so much caring about that, as meaning by his question—“ tell me where, and then I will come too ; ” pledging himself to follow faithfully, as a dog behind his master, wherever He went.

Our Lord answered the underlying meaning of the words, repeating with a personal application what He had just before said as a general principle—“Whither I go thou canst not follow Me now, but thou shalt follow Me afterwards.” Then followed this noteworthy dialogue.

The whole significance of the incident is preserved for us in the beautiful legend which tells us how, near the city of Rome, on the Appian Way, as Peter was flying for his life, he met the Lord, and again said to Him : “Lord, whither goest Thou ?” The words of the question, as given in the Vulgate, are the name of the site of the supposed interview, and of the little church which stands on it. The Master answered : “I go to Rome, to be crucified again.” The answer smote the heart of the Apostle, and turned the cowardly fugitive into a hero ; and he followed his Lord, and went gladly to his death. For it was that death which had to be accomplished before Peter was able to follow his Lord.

Now, as to the words before us, I think we shall best gather their significance, and lay it upon our own hearts, if we simply follow the windings of the dialogue. There are three points : the audacious question, the rash vow, and the sad forecast.

I. THE AUDACIOUS QUESTION.

As Peter’s first question, “Lord, whither goest Thou ?” meant not so much what it said, as “I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest ; tell me, that I

70 "WHY CANNOT I FOLLOW THEE NOW"

may ; " so the second question, in like manner, is really not so much a question, " Why cannot I follow Thee now ? " as the nearest possible approach to a flat contradiction of our Lord. Peter puts his words into the shape of an interrogation ; what he means is, " Yes, I *can* follow Thee ; and in proof thereof, I will lay down my life for Thy sake." The man's persistence, the man's love leading him to lack of reverence, came out in this (as I have ventured to call it) audacious question. Its underlying meaning was a refusal to believe the Master's word. But yet there was in it a nobility of resolution—broken afterwards, but never mind about that—to endure anything rather than to be separate from the Lord. Yet, though it was noble in its motive, but lacking in reverence in its form, there was a deeper error than that in it. Peter did not know what " following " meant, and he had to be taught that first. One of the main reasons why he could not follow was because he did not understand what was involved. It was something more than marching behind his Master, even to a Cross. There was a deeper discipline and a more strenuous effort needed than would have availed for such a kind of following.

Let us look a little onwards into his life. Recall that scene on the morning of the day by the banks of the lake, when he waded through the shallow water, and cast himself, dripping, at his Master's feet, and, having by his threefold confession obliterated his threefold

denial, was taken back to his Lord's love, and received the permission for which he had hungered, and which he had been told, in the Upper Room could not “ now ” be given :—“ Jesus said to him, Follow thou Me.” What a flood of remembrances must then have rushed over the penitent Peter ! how he must have thought to himself, “ So soon, so soon is the ‘ canst not ’ changed into a *can* ! So soon has the ‘ afterwards ’ come to be the present ! ”

And long years after that, when he was an old man, and experience had taught him what *following* meant, he shared his privilege with all the dispersed strangers to whom he wrote, and said to them, with a definite reference to this incident, and to the other after the resurrection, “ leaving us an example, that we (not I only, as I used to think, in my exuberant days of ignorance) should follow in His steps.”

So, brethren, this blundering, loving, audacious question suggests to us that to follow Jesus Christ is the supreme direction for all conduct. Men of all creeds, men of no creed, admit that. The

Loveliness of perfect deeds,
Higher than all poetic thought,

which is set forth in that life constitutes the living law to which all conduct is to be conformed, and will be noble in proportion as it is conformed.

There is the great blessing, and solemn obligation, and lofty prerogative of Christian morality, that for

obedience to a precept it substitutes following a person, and instead of saying to men, " Be good," it says to them " Be Christlike." It brings the conception of duty out of the region of abstractions into the region of living realities. For the cold statuesque ideal of perfection it substitutes a living Man, with a heart to love, and a hand to help, us. Thereby the whole aspect of striving after the right is changed ; for the work is made easier, and companionship comes in to aid morality, when Jesus Christ says to us, " Be like Me ; and then you will be good and blessed." Effort will be all but as blessed as attainment, and the sense of pressing hard after Him will be only less restful than the consciousness of having attained. To follow Him is bliss, to reach Him is heaven.

But in order that this following should be possible, there must be something done that had not been done when Peter asked, " Why cannot I follow Thee now ? " One reason why he could not was, as I said, because he did not know yet what " following " meant, and because he was unfit yet for this assimilation of his character and of his conduct to the likeness of his Lord. And another reason was because the Cross still lay before the Lord, and until that death of infinite love and utter self-sacrifice for others had been accomplished, the pattern was not yet complete, nor the highest ideal of human life realized in life. Therefore the " following " was impossible. Christ must die before He has com-

pleted the example that we are to follow, and Christ must die before the impulse shall be given to us, which shall make us able to tread, however falteringly and far behind, in His footsteps.

The essence of His life and of His death lies in the two things, entire suppression of personal will in obedience to the will of the Father ; and entire self-sacrifice for the sake of humanity. And however there is—and God forbid that I should ever forget in my preaching that there is—a uniqueness in that sacrifice, in that life, and in that death, which beggars all imitation, and needs and tolerates no repetition whilst the world lasts, still along with this, there is that which is imitable in the life and imitable in the death of the Master. To follow Jesus is to live denying self for God, and to live sacrificing self for men. Nothing less than these are included in the solemn words, “leaving us”—even in the act and article of death when He “suffered for us”—“an example that we should follow His steps.”

The word rendered example refers to the headline which the writing-master gives his pupils to copy, line by line. We all know how clumsy the pothooks and hangers are, how blurred the page with many a blot. And yet there, at the top of it, stands the master's fair writing, and though even the last line on the page will be blotted and blurred, when we turn it over and begin on the new leaf, the copy will be like the original, “and we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He

is." "Thou shalt follow Me afterwards" is a commandment; blessed be God, it is also a promise. For let us not forget that the "following" ends in an attaining; even as the Lord Himself has said in another connexion, when He spake: "If any man serve Me, let him . . . follow Me, and where I am, there shall also My servant be." Of course, if we follow, we shall come to the same place one day. And so the great promise will be fulfilled: "They shall follow the Lamb," in that higher life, "whithersoever He goeth;" and not as here imperfectly, and far behind, but close beside Him, and keeping step for step, being with Him first, and following Him afterwards.

But let us remember that with regard to that future following and its completeness, the same present incapacity applies, as clogs and mars the "following," which is conforming our lives to His. For, as He Himself has said to us, "I go to prepare a place for you," and until He had passed through death and into His glory, there was no standing-ground for human feet on the golden pavements, and heaven was inaccessible to man until Christ had died. Thus, as all life is changed when it is looked upon as being a following of Jesus, so death becomes altogether other when it is so regarded. The first martyr outside the city wall, bruised and battered by the cruel stones, remembered his Master's death, and shaped his own to be like it. As Jesus, when He died, had said: "Father, into Thy hands I

commit My spirit,” Stephen, dying, said : “ Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” As the Master had given His last breath to the prayer, “ Father, forgive them ; they know not what they do,” so Stephen shaped his last utterance to a conformity with his Lord’s, in which the difference is as significant as the likeness, and said, “ Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.” And then, as the record beautifully says, amidst all that wild hubbub and cruel assault, “ he fell on sleep,” as a child on its mother’s breast. Death is changed when it becomes the following of Christ.

II. WE HAVE HERE A RASH VOW.

“ I will lay down my life for Thy sake.” What a strange inversion of parts is here ! “ Lay down thy life for My sake ”—with Calvary less than four-and-twenty hours off, when Christ laid down His life for Peter’s sake. Peter was guilty of an anachronism in the words, for the time did not come for the disciple to die for his Lord till after the Lord had died for His disciple. But he was right in feeling, though he felt it only in regard to an external and physical act, that to follow Jesus, it was necessary to be ready to die for Him. And that is the great truth which underlies and half redeems the rashness of this vow, and needs to be laid upon our hearts, if we are ever to be the true followers of the Master. Death for Christ is necessary if we are to follow Him. There is nothing that a man can do deeply and truly, in a manner

worthy of a Christian, which has not underlying it, either the death of self-will and all the godless nature, or if need be, the actual physical death, which is a much smaller matter. You cannot follow Christ except you die daily. No man has ever yet trodden in His footsteps except on condition of, moment by moment, slaying self, suppressing self, abjuring self, breaking the connexion of self with the material world, and yielding up himself as a living sacrifice, in a living death, to the Lord of life and death. Do not think that "following Christ" is a mere sentimental expression for so much morality as we can conveniently get into our daily life. But remember that here, with all his rashness, with all his ignorance, with all his superficiality, the Apostle has laid hold upon the great permanent, but alas! much-forgotten, principle that to die is essential to following Jesus.

This daily dying, which is a far harder thing to do than to go to a cross once, and have done with it—was impossible for Peter then, though he did not know it. His vow was a rash one, because the laying down of Christ's life, for Peter's sake and for ours, had not yet been accomplished. *There* is the motive-power by which, and by which alone, drawn in gratitude, and melted down from all our selfishness, we, too, in our measure and our turn, are able to yield ourselves, in daily crucifixion of our evil, and daily abnegation of self-trust, and self-pleasing, and self-will, to the Lord

that has died for us. He must lay down His life for our sakes, and we must know that He has done it, and rest upon Him as our great Sacrifice and our atoning Priest, or else we shall never be so loosed from the tyranny of self as to be ready to live by dying, and to die that we may live for His sake. “ I go to Rome to be crucified again ” were the words which in the old legend braced the fugitive and made a hero of him, and sent him back to be crucified like his Lord and to offer up the physical life, as he had long since offered up his self will and his arrogance, to the Lord that had died for him.

O Lord our Father, help us, we beseech Thee, that we may be of the sheep that hear the Shepherd's voice and follow Him. Strengthen our faith in that dear Lord Who has laid down His life for us, that we may daily, by self-denial and self-sacrifice, lay down our lives for Him, and follow Him here, in all the footsteps of His love.

The Collapse of Self-Confidence

Jesus answered him, Wilt thou lay down thy life for My sake ? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied Me thrice.—JOHN xiii. 38.

IN the last sermon I partly considered the dialogue of which this is the concluding portion, and found that it consisted of an audacious question : “ Why cannot I follow Thee now ? ” which really meant a contradiction of our Lord ; of a rash vow—“ I will lay down my life for Thy sake ”—and of a sad forecast : “ The cock shall not crow till thou has denied Me thrice.” I paused in the middle of considering the second of these three stages, the rash vow. I then pointed out that, however ignorant the Apostle was of what “ following Christ ” meant, he had hit the mark, and stumbled unknowingly upon the very essence of the Christian life, and an eternal truth, when he recognized that, somehow or other, to “ follow Christ ” meant to die for Him. That is so, and is so always, for there is no following Christ which is not a “ dying daily,” by self-immolation and detachment from the world, and the

life of sense and self. But this rash vow has to be looked at from a somewhat different point of view, and we have to consider, not only the strangely blended right and wrong, error and deep truth, that lie in its substance, but the strangely blended right and wrong in the state of feeling and thought, on the part of the Apostle, which it represents. And taking up the dropped thread, I first deal with that, and then with the sad forecast which follows.

So then, looking at these words as being like all our words, even the best of them, strangely mingled of right and wrong, good and evil, I find in them,

I. A NOBLE, SINCERE, BUT TRANSIENT EMOTION AND IMPULSE.

"I will lay down my life for Thy sake." He meant it, every word of it; and he would have done it too, if only a gibbet or cross could have been set up then and there, in the upper room. But unfortunately the moments of elevation and high wrought enthusiasm, and the calls to martyrdom, do not always coincide. In the upper room, with its sacred atmosphere, it was easy to feel, and would have been easy to do, nobly. But it was not so easy, lying drowsily in Gethsemane, in the cold spring night, waiting for the Master's coming out from beneath the trembling shadows of the olive trees, or huddled up by the fire at the lower end of the hall in the grey morning, when vitality is at its lowest.

So the sincere, noble utterance was but the expression

80 THE COLLAPSE OF SELF-CONFIDENCE

of impulse and emotion which lifted Peter for a moment, and did him good, but which likewise, running through him, left him dry, and all the weaker because of the gush of feeling which had foamed itself away in empty words. For, let us never forget that however high, noble, divinely inspired, emotion may be, in its nature it is transient, and is sure to be followed by reaction. Like the winter torrents in some parched land, the more they foam, the more speedily does the bed of them dry up again, and the more they carry down the very soil in which growth and fertility would be possible. A rush of feeling is apt to leave behind hard, insensitive rock. There is a close connexion between a predominantly emotional Christianity and a very imperfect life. Feeling is apt to be a substitute for action. Is it not a very remarkable thing that the word "benevolence," which means "kindly feeling," has come to take on the meaning rightly belonging to "beneficence," which means "kindly doing?" The emotional man blinds and hoodwinks himself, by thinking that his quick sensibility and lofty enthusiasm and warmth of emotion are action or as good as action. "Be thou warmed and filled," he says to his brother, and, in a lazy expansion of heart, forgets that he has never lifted a finger to help.

God forbid that I should seem to deprecate emotional religion or religious emotion. That is the last thing that needs to be done in this generation. If the Churches want one thing more than another, it is that their Chris-

tianity should become far more emotional than it is, and their impulses stronger, swifter, more spontaneous, more over-mastering, and that they should be urged by these, and not merely by the reluctant recognition that such and such a piece of sacrifice or effort is a debt that they are obliged to clear off. Their service will be glad service, only when it is impulsive service and emotional service. Dear brethren, a Christian man whose life is not influenced by the deepest and most fervid emotion of love to the great Love that died for him, is a monster. "The Lord's fire is in Jerusalem, and His furnace in Zion"—is that a description of the fervour of this Church, or of any Church in Christendom? A furnace? An ice-house! Think of some deserted cottage, with the roof fallen in, and in the cold chimney-place a rusty grate with some dead embers in it, and the snow lying upon the top of it—that is a truer description of a great many of our churches than "the Lord's furnace."

But the lesson to be taken from this incident before us is not the danger of emotion; it is rather the necessity of emotion, but with two provisos, that it shall be emotion based upon a clear recognition of the great truth that He has laid down His life for me; and that it shall be emotion harnessed to work, and not wasted in words. The mightier the plunge of the fall, the more electrical energy you can get out of it, and set that to work to drive the wheels of life. Do not be afraid of

82 THE COLLAPSE OF SELF-CONFIDENCE

emotion; you will make little of your Christianity unless you have it. But be sure that it is under the guidance of a clear perception of the truth that evokes it, and that it is all used to turn the wheels of life. "Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay." Better is it that emotion should be reticent and active than that it should be voluble and idle. It is a good servant, but a bad master. A man that trusts to impulse and emotion to further his Christian course, is like a ship in that belt of variable winds that lies near the Equator, where there will be a fine ten-knot breeze for an hour or two, and then a sickly, stagnating calm. Push further south, and get into the steady trades, where the wind blows with equable and persistent force all the year round in the same direction. Convert impulses and emotions into steadfast principle, warmed by emotion and borne on by impulse.

II. AGAIN, THIS RASH VOW IS AN ILLUSTRATION OF A CONFIDENCE, ALSO STRANGELY BLENDED OF GOOD AND EVIL.

"I will lay down my life for Thy sake." As I have said, Peter meant it. His words are paralleled by other words, in which two of the Lord's disciples answered His solemn question: "Are ye able to drink of the cup that I drink of?" with the unhesitating answer, "We are able." A great teacher has regarded that saying as one of "the ventures of faith." Perhaps it was.

Perhaps there was as much self-confidence as faith in it. Certainly there was more self-confidence than faith in Peter's answer, and his self-confidence collapsed when the trial came.

The world and the Church hold entirely antagonistic notions about the value of self-reliance. The world says that it is a condition of power. The Church says that it is the root of weakness. Self-confidence shuts a man out from the help of God, and so shuts him out from the source of power. For if you will think for a moment, you will see that the faith which the New Testament, in conformity with all wise knowledge of one's own self, preaches as the one secret of power, has for its obverse—its other side—diffidence and self-distrust. No man trusts God as God ought to be trusted, who does not distrust himself as himself ought to be distrusted. To level a mountain is the only way to carry the water across where it stood. You can, by mechanism and locks, take a canal up to the top of a hill, but you cannot take a river up to the top. And the river of God's help flows through the valley and seeks the lowest levels. Faith and self-despair are the upper and the under sides of the same thing, like some cunningly-woven cloth, the one side bearing a different pattern from the other, and yet made of the same yarn, and the same threads passing from the upper to the under sides. So faith and self-distrust are but two names for one composite whole.

84 THE COLLAPSE OF SELF-CONFIDENCE

I was once shown an old Jewish coin which had on the one side the words "sackcloth and ashes," and on the other side the words "a crown of gold." The coin meant to contrast what Israel had been with what Israel then was. The crown had come first; the sackcloth and ashes last. But we may use it for illustrating this point, on which I am now dwelling. Wherever and only where, there are the sackcloth and ashes of self-despair there will be the crown of gold of an answering faith. When thus, as Wesley has it, in his great hymn: "Confident in self-despair," we cling to God, then we can say: "When I am weak then am I strong," "Behold! we have no might, but our eyes are upon Thee." If Peter had only said, "By Thy help I will lay down my life for Thy sake," his confidence would have been reasonable and blessed self-confidence, because it was confidence in a self inspired by Divine power.

And so, brethren, whilst utter diffidence is right for us, and is the condition of all our reception of energy according to our need, the most absolute confidence—a confidence which, to the eye of the man that measures only visible things, will seem sheer insanity—is sobriety for a Christian. The world is perfectly right when it says: "If you believe you can do a thing, you have gone a long way towards doing it." The expectation of success has often the knack of fulfilling itself. But the world does not know our secret, and our secret is that our humble faith brings into the field the reserves

with the Captain of our salvation at their head. Therefore a self-distrusting Christian can say, and say without exaggeration or presumption, "I can do all things in Christ, strengthening me from within."

The Church's ideals are possibilities, when you bring God into the account, and they look insanity when you do not. Take, for instance, Missions. What an absurdity to talk about a handful of Christian people—for we are only a handful as compared with the whole world—carrying their gospel into every corner of the earth, and finding everywhere a response to it. Yes; it is absurd; but, wise Mr. Calculator, counter of heads, you have forgotten God in your estimate of whether it is reasonable or unreasonable. Again, take the Christian ideal of absolute perfection of character. "What nonsense to talk as if any man could ever come to that." Yes!—as if any *man* could come to that, I grant you. But if God is with him, the nonsense is to suppose that he will not come to it. Here is a row of cyphers as long as your arm. They mean nothing. Put a 1 at the left-hand end of the row; and what does it mean then? So the faith that brings Christ into the life, and into the Church, makes "nobodies" into mighty men—"laughs at impossibilities, and cries, It shall be done."

Still further, here, in this rash vow, we have an underestimate of difficulties. There was another incident in the life of the Apostle, a strange replica of this one, into which he pushed himself, just as he did into the

high priest's hall, partly out of curiosity and a wish to be prominent ; partly out of love to his Master. Without a moment's consideration of the peril into which he was thrusting himself, he sat in the boat, and said, " Bid me come to Thee on the water." He forgot that He was heavy, and that water was not solid, and that the wind was high, and the lake rough, and when he put his foot over the side, and felt the cold waves creeping up his knees, his courage ebbed out with his faith, and he began to sink. Then he cried, " Lord ! help me ! " If he had thought for a moment of the reality of the case, he would have sat still in the boat. If he had thought of what would be in his way in following Jesus to death, he would have hesitated to vow. But it is so much easier to resolve heroisms in a quiet corner than to do them when the strain comes. And it is so much easier to do some one great thing that has in it enthusiasm and nobility, and conspicuousness of sacrifice, especially if it can be got over in a moment, like having one's head off with an axe, than it is to " die daily." Ah, brethren, it is the little difficulties that make *the* difficulty. You read in the newspapers in the autumn every now and then, of trains, in that wonderful country across the water, being stopped by caterpillars. The Christian train is stopped by an army of caterpillars, far oftener than it is by some solid and towering barrier. Our Christian lives are a great deal likelier to come to failure, because we do not

take into account the multiplied small antagonisms than because we are not ready to face the greater ones. What could you think of a bridge builder, who built a bridge across some mountain torrent and made no allowance for freshets and floods when the ice melted? His bridge and his piers would be gone the first winter. You remember who it was that said that he went into the Franco-German War "with a light heart," and in seven weeks came Sedan and the dethronement of an emperor, and the surrender of an army. "Blessed is he that feareth always." There is no more fatal error than an under-estimate of our difficulties.

III. LET ME SAY A WORD ABOUT THE SAD FORECAST HERE.

"Thou shalt deny me thrice."

We cannot say that poor Peter's fall was at all an anomalous or uncommon thing. He did exactly what a great many of us are doing. He could—and I have no doubt he would—have gone to the death for Jesus Christ; but he could not stand being laughed at for Him. He would have been ready to meet the executioner's sharp sword, but the servant-girl's sharp tongue was more than he could bear. And so he denied Jesus, not because he was afraid of his skin—for I do not suppose that the servants had any notion of doing anything more than amusing themselves with a few clumsy gibes at his expense—but because he could not bear to be made game of.

88 THE COLLAPSE OF SELF-CONFIDENCE

Now, dear brethren, I suppose we are all of us more or less movers in circles in which it sometimes is not considered "good form" to show that we are Christian people. You young men in your warehouses, you students at Owen's, where it is a sign of being "fossils," and "behind the times," and "not up to date," to say "I am a Christian," and all of us in our several places have sometimes to gather our courage together, and not be afraid to declare whose we are. No doubt life is a better witness than words, but no doubt also life is not so good a witness as it might be, unless it sometimes has the commentary of words as well. Thus, to confess Christ means two things; to say sometimes—in the face of a smile of scorn, which is often harder to bear than something much more dangerous—"I am His," and to live Christ, and to say by conduct "I am His." "Whosoever shall confess Me before men, him will I also confess before My Father, and whosoever shall deny Me, him will I also deny." Do not button your coats over your uniform. Do not take the cockade out of your hats when you go amongst "the other side." Live Jesus, and, when advisable, preach Jesus.

But Peter's fall, which is typical of what we are all tempted to do, has in it a gracious message; for it proclaims the possibility of recovery from any depth of descent, and of coming back again from any distance of wandering. Did you ever notice how Peter's fall was burnt in upon his memory, so as that when he began to

preach after Pentecost, the shape that his indictment of his hearers takes is, "Ye *denied* the Holy One and the Just," and how, long after—if the second Epistle which goes by his name is his—in summing-up the crimes of the heretics whom he is branding, he speaks of their "denying the Lord that bought them." He never forgot his denial, and it remained with him as the expression for all that was wrong in a man's relation to Jesus Christ. And I suppose not only was it burnt in upon his memory, but it burnt out all his self-confidence. It is beautiful to see how, in his letter, he speaks over and over again, of "fear" as being a wise temper of mind for a Christian. As George Herbert has it, "A sad, wise valour is the true complexion." Thus the man that had been so confident in himself learnt to say "Be ready to give to every man that asketh you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear."

And do you not think that his fall drew him closer to Jesus Christ than ever he had been before, as he learnt more of His pardoning love and mercy? Was he not nearer the Lord on that morning when the two together, alone, talked after the Resurrection? Was he not nearer Him when he struggled to his feet from the boat on the Lake, on that morning when he was received back into his office as Christ's Apostle? Did he ever forget how he had sinned? Did he ever forget how Christ had pardoned? Did he ever forget how Christ loved and would keep him? Ah, no! The

90 THE COLLAPSE OF SELF-CONFIDENCE

rope that is broken is strongest where it is spliced, not because it was broken, but because a cunning hand has strengthened it. We may be the stronger for our sins, not because sin strengthens, for it weakens, but because God restores. It is possible that we may build a fairer structure on the ruins of our old selves. It is possible that we may turn every field of defeat into a field of victory. It is possible that we may

“Fall to rise; be beaten, to fight better.”

If only we cling to the Lord our Strength, the promise shall be ours—whatever our failures, denials, backslidings, inconsistencies—“though he fall he shall not be utterly cast down, for the Lord upholdeth him with His hand.”

The Devout Life Here and Here-after.

I have set the Lord always before me : because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved . . . In Thy presence is fulness of joy ; at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.—Ps. xvi. 8, 11.

IHAVE put these two verses together because they present striking parallels in expression, and a close connexion of thought. As to the parallel expressions, notice “before me” in the one verse, and “in Thy presence” in the other. The two phrases, though not identical, are synonymous. There follow another pair of parallels, “my right hand” in the former clause answering to “Thy right hand” in the latter. Then as to the connexion of thought, the former verse describes the devout life as it is lived here on earth, the latter is most naturally and adequately understood as pointing to the devout life as it is perfected in heaven. It is, perhaps, the clearest expression of confidence in immortality to be found in the Old Testament, and it is instructive to notice the way by which the Psalmist comes to that confidence. My two texts are linked

together by two intervening verses, which begin with a "therefore." "I shall not be moved; therefore"—because of my present experience of the Divine presence, and the stability which it brings—"therefore my heart is glad, and . . . my flesh also shall rest in hope that Thou wilt not leave my soul in Sheol; neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption." That is to say, the Christian experience of communion on earth necessarily leads on to the expectation of its own persistence, and makes it ridiculous to suppose that such a purely physical thing as death should have any power over such a bond. You might as well suppose that a sword could wound a soul.

But that is not all that the connexion of these two verses suggests. It implies the correspondence of these two phases of the devout life. Not only is the one the ground for believing in the other, but the one is the germ of the other.

For the Christian life on earth and in heaven is continuous, and that which is but tendency and thwarted aim and unreached direction here will become fact hereafter. "To-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant." Continuity and increase lie at the basis of the Christian hope. And if ever we are to have present confidence of immortality, or ever to possess the reality of it in a future life, it must be because we here have set the Lord always before us. If we are ever to be set at His right hand in the heavenly places, it will

be as the natural culmination and termination of our having set Him at our right hands amidst the struggles and strifes of earth. Let us, then, look at these two points, the devout life as it is lived here, and the devout life as it is perfected hereafter.

I. THE DEVOUT LIFE AS IT IS LIVED HERE.

There are three stages of experience marked out in the first of our texts. "I have set the Lord always before me"—that is one; "He is at my right hand"—that is another; "I shall not be moved"—that is the third, the issue of all. Or, to put it into other language, we have here the effort of faith, the presence of God whom the effort brings near; the steadfastness that the presence of God bestows.

As to the first, "I have set the Lord always before me"—with a dead lift of effort on my part. We cannot have God constantly in sight unless we blind our eyes to a great deal besides. There are—need I remind you?—three things that, taken together, build up for us a very thick, triple wall between us and God. There is sense, and all that it reveals to us; there are duties, necessary, possibly blessed, but actually often disturbing and limiting; and thickest and most opaque of the three screens, there are the sins which dim our capacity, and check our inclination, of realizing the Divine Presence. So we need to set our teeth in the determination that, notwithstanding all the distractions of our daily work, and notwithstanding all the

clamant appeals of sense and the things of sense, and notwithstanding the recoil from God which the consciousness of disobedience and alienation through sin makes, so that we do not like to retain Him in our knowledge, we *will* "set the Lord always before us."

That needs that we shall shut out a great deal besides, as a man that tries to see something on the horizon will hold his palm above his eyes to exclude nearer objects and the glare that dazzles. It needs that we shall resolutely concentrate our thoughts upon Him. We have to be ignorant of much if we would know any of the sciences, or of the practical arts, and we have to shear off not less if we would know the best knowledge, and be experts in the highest art of life. As the old mystics used to say, when Saul on the road to Damascus saw nothing, he saw Christ, and you and I, brethren, must learn to turn away our eyes from seeing vanity, if we are ever to see the one solid and permanent reality, which is God.

There must be, too, a resolute effort to still our hearts. It is not when the surface is agitated by winds of passion, or stirred by violent emotions, or ruffled by a multitude of tiny catspaws of distractions, that the sun is mirrored in it by day or the stars by night. The lake must be still that reflects the blue. It is the quiet heart that sees God, and is further quieted by the vision.

There must also be resolute effort to cast out the sins and transgressions that draw a veil over our eyes, and

bribe us to forget God and ignore Him. "Blessed are the pure in heart ; they shall see God." The tarnished steel mirror, or the glass one with many a flaw in its surface, where the quicksilver has been triturerated off by the rubbing of sin, will give but a broken image.

For all these ends, the suppression of sin, the quieting of heart, the victory over sense, we need that there shall be a very continuous, a very resolute, a very self-mastering effort, or we shall never have God before us. "I *will* walk before the Lord in the land of the living" is a resolution not to be kept without much struggle with our weaker selves.

Then comes the second stage God is brought near by this effort. "I have set the Lord always before me. He is at my right hand." Now, of course, in Him "we live and move and have our being," and "He is not far from every one of us." But the fact that we all have God nearer to us than we are to ourselves, and that it is impossible for any creature to get away from Him, remaining as it does, certain, our relation to that fact varies according to our realization of it. If a man has not Him in all his thoughts, it is the same to that man, in regard to the most important parts of his being, as if infinite distance were between him and God. There may as well be no God, as far as a great many of us are concerned, in the most important matters of our lives, as a God that we never think about. He is not far from "every one of us" ; but we may be very far from Him,

and we *are* very far from Him unless, by the effort of which I have been speaking, we set Him before us.

And what does His being at "my right hand" mean—which being at my right hand is only possible on condition of our having honestly, and as far as human weakness will allow, continuously, sought to set Him before us? What do you mean when you speak of some one being your right hand man? You mean a companion, an ally, a friend on whom you can absolutely trust, to whom you can turn in every difficulty, to whom you can commit all your most important interests and affairs, quite sure that they will be looked after successfully. God is your right hand Man, if I may so say, on condition of your having set Him always before you. There will be intimacy, close companionship, communication of strength, favour. He is "at my right hand," and what that means may best perhaps be put, in the words of another psalmist and of a prophet: "The Lord is thy shade, at thy right hand: He will keep thee from henceforth, even for evermore," or, as the prophet has it: "I have holden thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not, I will help thee."

And so we come to the last of the three stages in this first part of my text, and that is, the strength that the presence of God brings with it. The Lord is at "my right hand, I shall not be moved."

The consequence seems a very modest one to draw from so great a premise. The effect is but little, as

compared with the cause. Is all that we could hope for from a present God that we shall be able to stand steadfast? No—not all. But life chastens expectations, and any man who knows his own inward instability and the strong forces that are brought against him, will feel that it is not so small a hope when he dares to say: “I shall not be moved.” It is far beyond what any other fact than the fact of God’s presence with us can warrant our cherishing. The presumptuous man in one of the psalms speaks thus: “In my prosperity I said, I shall not be moved.” But when prosperity fled, self-confidence fled with it, and at length he learnt to say, as he goes on to tell us: “by Thy favour Thou hast made my mountain to stand strong. Thou didst hide Thy face, and I was troubled.” Ah! brethren, think of the instability of our resolutions, think of the fluctuations of our thoughts, think of the surges of our emotions, think of the changes that by subtle degrees pass over us all, so as that the old man’s grey hair and bowed form is less unlike to his childish buoyancy and clustering ringlets, than are his senile thoughts and memories to his juvenile expectations. Think of the forces that are brought to bear upon us, the shocks of calamity and sorrow by which we are beaten and battered, the blasts of temptation by which we are sometimes all but overthrown, the floods that come and beat upon our house. If we realize all these, even imperfectly, we shall feel that it is a foolish thing for a man to say:

Call forth thy powers, my soul, and dare
The tumult of unequal war:"

and that there must be a holdfast outside myself fixed into something stable, to which I can hook my poor cable. If ever I am to stand fast it must be because, like a lame man, though I have not feet that can plant themselves firmly, I have a pair of hands that can, and do, grasp the hand that upholds me. When Thou holdest me up by the right hand of Thy righteousness, I shall be steadfast.

That steadfastness will come to us by the actual communication of strength, and it will come to us because, in the consciousness of the Divine Presence there lies a charm that takes the glamour out of temptation and the pain out of wounds. He being with us, the dazzling, treacherous brilliancies of earth cease to dazzle and betray. He being with us, sorrow itself and pain, and all the ills that flesh is heir to, have little power to shake the soul.

So, brethren, learn the secret of permanence amidst a world of change and temptation. "Stand fast in the Lord, dearly beloved;" and if you would have your house so firm that when the rain descends and the winds blow against it, it may stand foursquare and not even trembling, see to it that it is founded on the Rock; and take for your own the vow of the psalmist, "I have set the Lord always before me." Then you will have for your own the blessed consciousness that "the Lord is

at my right hand," and the blessed experience that followed in his case, "I shall not be moved."

And now let me turn more briefly to the second of our two texts, which shows us—

II. THE DEVOUT LIFE, AS IT IS PERFECTED IN HEAVEN.

If we set the Lord in our presence here, He will set us in His hereafter. "In Thy presence" in my text is literally "with Thy face," and the thought is suggested, about which it does not become us to speak much, that the Christian hope of immortality embraces both a clearer vision of God's face, and a closer proximity to His right hand.

As to the former, I venture but a word—"Through a glass darkly, then face to face." There may be, there must be, fresh, unspeakable manifestations of the Divine character. There may be, there must be, fresh and at present inconceivable new powers of apprehension. Because when close to the sun, it shows broader and brighter than when seen from the boundaries of the solar system, and because in the new house, not made with hands, there will be probably wide windows where now there are solid walls or loopholes for arrows, "His servants shall see His face" then as they do not now. The sight of God's face is associated with being at God's right hand. Here we set Him at ours for defence, companionship, strength. There He sets us at His, for intimacy and proximity of presence and

fellowship, for favour and dignity, as they who are honoured by a prince are set at his right hand, in token of approval, or as the sheep in the Judgment are at the right, and the goats at the left. Christian men are God's Benjamins—sons of the right hand. And all of favour and dignity, and closeness of companionship, which the emblem suggests, is but a shadow and faint hint of the realities of the Heavens.

The issue of that clearer vision and place at the right hand of the Majesty of the heavens is not, as it needed to be here amidst the struggles and changes of life, stability mainly, but, as it is in some measure even here, and will be perfectly hereafter—joy that is full and perpetual. There is no more need for an Ally, for there are no more enemies. There is no more need for strength to overcome, for there is no battle. There is no more need for shield and helmet, for there are no swords to be flashed or arrows to be shot against us; but there is the need for the festal robe and the triumphal palm.

That presence which amidst warfare, weakness and mutability, manifested itself in its gift of steadfastness, will then, amidst the tranquillity of Heaven, manifest itself in a joy unlike all earthly joy in that it is full, and yet more unlike all earthly joy in that it is perpetual. Here there is ever something lacking in all our gladness, some guest at the table that sulks and will not partake and rejoice, some unlit window in the

illumination, some limitation in the gladness ; yonder joy will be full. " I shall be satisfied when I awake in Thy likeness,"—here, thank God ! we have brooks by the way ; there we shall stoop down and drink from the fountain, the ocean of joy. And the gladness is perpetual, in that, having nothing to do with physical causes or externals, there is no curse of change and no certainty of reaction. Those flowers are unfading, and those joys succeed one another in exhaustless profusion, ever following on each other like the run of the ripples in the tide of some sunlit sea. A poet once said—and he knew it only too well—

"Pleasures are like poppies spread,
You grasp the flower, the bloom is shed ;
Or like the snowflake on the river,
A moment white, then gone for ever."

All joy here is imperfect and transient. " Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heaviness." But if we will set the Lord before our faces here, He will set us before His face there. If we have Him at our right hands here, He will put us at His right hand there. If we have His presence ministering to us strength amidst earth's changes and struggles, His presence will minister to us joy, full and perpetual, amid the completeness and tranquillities of the Heavens. The ladder is on earth, its top is hard by the Throne. The Christian experience more than repeats the psalmist's here, and the Christian's brighter hopes are

at once certified and surpassed by Christ, when He says : “ I will come again and receive you to myself, that where I am ”—at the right hand of God—“ there ye may be also.” “ These things have I spoken unto you that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.”

Righteousness First, Peace Second

First being by interpretation King of Righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is King of Peace.—HEB. vii. 2.

THAT mysterious, shadowy figure of the priest-king Melchizedec has been singularly illuminated and solidified by recent discovery. You can see now in Berlin and London, letters written fourteen centuries before Christ, by a king of Jerusalem who describes himself almost in the very words which the Old and the New Testaments apply to Melchizedec. He says that he is a royal priest or a priestly king. He says that he derived his royalty neither from father nor mother, nor by genealogical descent; and he says that he owes it to “the great King”—possibly an equivalent to the “Most High God;” of whom Melchizedec in Scripture is said to have been a worshipper. The name of the letter writer is not Melchizedec, but the fact that that royalty was not hereditary, like a Pharaoh’s, may explain how each monarch bore his own personal appellation, and not one common to successive members of a dynasty.

And are not the names of King and city significant

—"King of righteousness . . . King of peace?" It sounds like a yearning, springing up untimely in those dim ages of oppression and strife, for a royalty founded on something better than the sword, and wielded for something higher than personal ambition. Such an ideal at such a date is like a summer day that has wandered into a cold March.

But the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews imposes a meaning not only on the titles, but on their sequence. Of course therein he is letting a sanctified imagination play round a fact, and giving to it a meaning which is not in it. None the less in that emphatic expression "*first* King of righteousness, and *after that* also King of peace," he penetrated very deeply into the heart of Christ's reign and work, and echoed a sentiment that runs all through Scripture. Hearken to one psalmist: "The mountains shall bring peace to the people, and the little hills, by righteousness." Hearken to another: "Righteousness and peace have kissed each other." Hearken to a prophet: "The work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever." Hearken to the most Hebraistic of New Testament writers: "The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace." Hearken to the central teaching of the most Evangelical, if I may so say, of New Testament writers: "Being justified"—made righteous—"by faith, we have peace with God." So the "*first*" and the "*after that*" reveal to us the very depth of

Christ's work, and carry in them not only important teaching as to that, but equally important directions and guides for Christian conduct; and it is to this aspect of my text, and this only, that I ask your attention now.

The order which we have here, "first of all King of righteousness, and after that King of peace," is the order which I shall try to illustrate in two ways. First, in reference to Christ's work on the individual soul; second, in reference to Christ's work on society and communities.

First, then, here we have laid down the sequence in which

I. CHRIST COMES WITH HIS OPERATIONS AND HIS GIFTS TO THE SOUL THAT CLINGS TO HIM.

First "righteousness . . . after . . . peace." Now I need not do more than in a sentence remind you of the basis upon which the thoughts in the text, and all right understanding of Christ's work on an individual, repose, and that is that without righteousness no man can either be at peace with God or with himself. Not with God—for however shallow experience may talk effusively and gushingly about a God that is all mercy, and who loves and takes to His heart the sinner and the saint alike; such a God drapes the universe in darkness. And if there are no moral distinctions which determine whether a man is in amity or hostility with God, then "the pillared firmament itself is rottenness,

106 RIGHTEOUSNESS FIRST, PEACE SECOND

and earth's base built on stubble." No, no, brethren ; it sounds very tender and kindly ; at bottom it is the cruellest thing that you can say, to say that without righteousness a man can please God. The sun is in the heavens, and whether there be mist and fog down here, or the bluest of summer skies, the sun *is* above. But its rays coming through the ethereal blue are warmth and blessedness, and its rays cut off by the mists are dim, and itself turned into a lurid ball of fire. It cannot be—and thank God that it cannot—that it is all the same to Him whether a man is saint or sinner.

I do not need to remind you that in like manner righteousness must underlie peace with oneself. For it is true to-day, as it was long generations ago, according to the prophet, that "the wicked is like the troubled sea which cannot rest, whose waters throw up mire and dirt," and, on the other hand, the promise is true still and for ever ; "O that thou hadst hearkened unto me, then had thy peace been like a river," because "thy righteousness" is "like the waves of the sea." For ever and ever it stands true that for peace with God, and for a quiet heart, and a nature at harmony with itself, there must be righteousness.

Well then, Jesus Christ comes to bring to a man the righteousness without which there can be no peace in his life. And that is the meaning of the great word which, having been taken for a shibboleth and "test of a falling or a standing Church," has been far too much

ossified into a mere theological dogma, and has been weakened and misunderstood in the process. Justification by faith ; that is the battle-cry of Protestant communities. And what does it mean ? That I shall be treated as righteous, not being so ? That I shall be forgiven and acquitted ? Yes, thank God ! But is that all that it means, or is it the main thing that it means ? No, thank God ! for the very heart of the Christian doctrine of righteousness is this, that if, and as soon as, a man puts his trembling trust in Jesus Christ as his Saviour, then he receives not merely pardon, which is the uninterrupted flow of the Divine love in spite of his sin, nor a crediting him with a righteousness which does not belong to him, but an imparting to him of that new life, a spark from the central fire of Christ's life, " the new man which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness." Do not suppose that the great message of the Gospel is merely forgiveness. Do not suppose that its blessed gift is only that a man is acquitted because Christ has died. All that is true. But there is something more than that which is the basis of that other, and that is that by my faith in Jesus Christ, I am so knit to Him—" He that is joined to the Lord " being " one spirit "—as that there passes into me, by His gift, a life which is created after His life, and is in fact cognate and kindred with it.

No doubt it is a mere germ, no doubt it needs cultivating, development, carefully guarding against gnawing

108 RIGHTEOUSNESS FIRST, PEACE SECOND

insects and blighting frosts. But the seed which is implanted, though it be less than the least of all seeds, has in itself the promise and the potency of triumphant growth, when it will tower above all the poisonous shrubs and undergrowth of the forest, and have the light of heaven resting on its aspiring top. Here is the great blessing and distinctive characteristic of Christian morality, that it does not say to a man: "First aim after good deeds, and so grow into goodness," but it starts with a gift, and says, "Work from that, and by the power of that. 'I make the tree good,' " says Jesus to us, "do you see to it that the fruit is good." No doubt the vegetable metaphor is inadequate, because the leaf is wooed from out the bud, and "grows green and broad, and takes no care." But that effortless growth is not how righteousness increases in men. The germ is given them, and they have to cultivate it. First, there must be the impartation of righteousness, and then there comes to the man's heart the sweet assurance of peace with God, and he has within him "a conscience like a sea at rest, imaginations calm and fair." "First, King of righteousness; after that, King of peace."

Now if we keep firm hold of this sequence, a great many of the popular objections to the Gospel, as if it were merely a means of forgiveness and escape, and a system of reconciliation by some kind of forensic expedient, fall away of themselves. And a great many

of the popular blunders that Christian people make fall away too. For there are good folks to whom the great truth that "God is in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing to them their trespasses," and welcoming them to all the fulness of an overflowing love, has obscured the other truth that there is no peace for a Christian man continuous through his life, unless equally continuous through his life are his efforts to work out in acts the new nature which he has received.

Thus my text, by the order in which it places righteousness and peace, not only illuminates the work of Christ upon each individual soul, but comes with a very weighty and clear direction to Christian people as to their course of conduct. Are you looking for comfort? Is what you want to get out of your religion mainly the assurance that you will not go to Hell? Is the great blessing that Christ brings to you only the blessing of pardon, which you degrade to mean immunity from punishment? You are wrong. "First of all, King of righteousness"—let that which is first of all in His gifts be first of all in your efforts too; and do not seek so much for comfort as for grace to know and to do your duty, and strength to "cast off the unfruitful works of darkness," and to "put on the armour of light." The order which is laid down in my text was laid down with a different application, by our Lord Himself, and ought to be in both forms the motto for all Christian people. "Seek ye first the Kingdom of

God and His righteousness, and all these things"—comfort, sense of reconciliation, assurance of forgiveness, joyful hope, and the like, as well as needful material good—"shall be added unto you."

And now, secondly, my text gives the order of

II. CHRIST'S WORK IN THE WORLD, AND OF HIS SERVANT'S WORK AFTER HIM.

Of course, our Lord's work in the World is simply the aggregate of His work on individual souls. But for the sake of clearness we may consider these two aspects of it somewhat apart. In regard to this second part of my subject, I would begin, as I began in the former section, by reminding you that the only basis on which harmonious relations between men in communities, great or small, can be built, is righteousness, in the narrowest sense of the word, meaning thereby justice, equal dealing as between man and man, without partiality or class favouritism. Wherever you get an unjustly-treated section or order of men, there you get the beginnings of war and strife. A social order built upon injustice, just in the measure in which it is so built, is based upon a quicksand which will suck it down, or on a volcano which will blow it to pieces. Injustice is the grit in the machine; you may oil it as much as you like with philanthropy and benevolence, but until you get the grit out it will not work smoothly. There is no harmony amongst men unless their association is based and bottomed upon righteousness.

Jesus Christ comes into the world to bring peace at the far end, but righteousness at the near end, and therefore strife. The herald angels sang peace upon earth. They were looking to the deepest and ultimate issues of His mission, but when He contemplated its immediate results He had to say, "Suppose ye that I bring peace on earth? I tell you nay, but rather division." He rode into Jerusalem "the King, meek, and having salvation," throned upon the beast of burden which symbolized peace. But He will come forth in the last fight, as He has been coming forth through all the ages, mounted on the white horse, with the sword girt upon His thigh in behalf of meekness and righteousness and truth. Christ, and Christianity when it keeps close to Christ, is a ferment, not an emollient. The full and honest application of Christ's teaching and principles to any society on the face of the earth at this day is bound to result in agitation and strife. There is no help for it. When a pure jet of water is discharged into a foul ditch, there will be much uprising of mud. Effervescence will always follow when Christ's principles are applied to existing institutions. And so it comes to pass that Christian men, in the measure in which they are true to their Master, turn the world upside down. There will follow, of course, the tranquillity that does follow on righteousness; but that is far ahead, and there is many a weary mile to be trod, and many a sore struggle to be undertaken, before the kingdoms of this

world become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and strife ends for ever.

Now, if this be so, then in this necessary characteristic of Christ's operation on the world, viz., disturbance arising from the endeavour to enthrone righteousness where its opposite has ruled—there results very plainly important teaching as to the duties of Christ's servants to take their full share in the fight, to be the Knights of the Holy Ghost, the champions of righteousness. The Church ought to lead in the van of all assaults on hoary wrongs or modern forms of unrighteousness in municipal, political, national life. And it is the disgrace of the Church that so largely it leaves that contest to be waged by men who make no pretence to be Christians.

There is, unfortunately, a type of Christian thinking and life, of which in many respects one would speak with all sympathy and admiration, which warns the Christian Church against casting itself into this contest, in the alleged interest of a superior spirituality, and a loftier conception of Evangelical truth. I believe, as heartily as any man can—and I venture to appeal, to those who hear me Sunday by Sunday, and from year to year, whether it is not so—that the preaching of Jesus Christ is the cure for all the world's miseries, and the banishment of all the world's unrighteousness, but am I to be told that the endeavour to apply the person and the principles of Jesus Christ, in His life and death, to

existing institutions and evils, is *not* preaching Christ ? I believe that it is, and that that is one thing that the Church wants to-day,—not less of holding up the Cross and the Sacrifice, but more of pointing to the Cross and the Sacrifice as the cure of all the world's evils, and the pattern for all righteousness.

It is difficult to do, it is made difficult by our own desire to be what the prophet did not think a very reputable position, “at ease in Zion.” It is also made difficult by the way in which, as is most natural, the world, meaning thereby Godless, organized society, regards an active Church that desires to bring *its* practices to the test of Christ's word. Muzzled watchdogs that can neither bark nor bite are much admired by burglars. And a Church that confines itself to theory, to what it calls religion, and leaves the world to go to the devil as it likes, suits both the world and the devil. There was once a Prime Minister of England who came out of church one Sunday morning in a state of towering indignation because the clergyman had spoken about conduct. And that is exactly how the world feels about an intrusive Church that *will* push its finger into all social arrangements, and say about each of them, “This must be done *as* Christ commanded.”

Brethren, would God that all Christian men deserved the name of “troublers of Israel.” There was once a prophet to whom the men of his day indignantly said, “O sword of the Lord, how long will it be ere thou be

quiet? Put up thyself in thy scabbard, rest and be still." And the answer was the only possible one, "How can it be quiet, seeing that the Lord hath appointed it?" If you and I are Christ's servants, we shall follow the sequence of His operations, and seek to establish righteousness first and then peace.

The true Salem is above.

"My soul, there is a country
Afair beyond the stars."

There "sweet peace sits crowned with smiles." The swords will then be wreathed with laurel, and men "shall learn war no more," for the King has fought the great fight, "and of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end . . . in righteousness and justice, from henceforth even for ever." Let us take Him for "the Lord our righteousness," and we shall blessedly find that "this Man is our peace." Let us take arms in the Holy War which He wages, and we shall have peace in our hearts whilst the fight is sorest. Let us labour to "be found in Him . . . having the righteousness which is of God by faith," and then we shall "be found in Him in peace, without spot, blameless."

Two Shepherds and Two Flocks

Like sheep they are laid in the grave ; Death shall feed on them —
PSALM xlix. 14.

The Lamb which is in the midst of the Throne shall feed them.—
REV. vii. 17.

THESE two verses have a much closer parallelism in expression than appears in our Authorized Version. If you turn to the Revised Version you will find that it rightly renders the former of my texts, "Death shall be their shepherd," and the latter, "The Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall be their Shepherd." The Old Testament psalmist and the New Testament seer have fallen upon the same image to describe death and the future, but with how different a use ! The one paints a grim picture, all sunless and full of shadow ; the other dips his pencil in brilliant colours, and suffuses his canvas with a glow as of molten sunlight. The difference between the two is partly due to the progress of Revelation and the light cast on life and immortality by Christ through the gospel. But it is much more due to the fact that the two writers have different classes in view. The one is speaking of

men whose portion is in this life, the other of men who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. And it is the characters of the persons concerned, much more than the degree of enlightenment possessed by the writers, that makes the difference between these two pictures. Life and death and the future are what each man makes of them for himself. We shall best deal with these two pictures if we take them separately, and let the gloom of the one enhance the glory of the other. They hang side by side, like a Rembrandt beside a Claude or a Turner, each intensifying by contrast the characteristics of the other. So let us look at the two—first, the grim picture drawn by the psalmist; second, the sunny one drawn by the seer. Now, with regard to the former,

I. THE GRIM PICTURE DRAWN BY THE PSALMIST.

We too often forget that a psalmist is a poet, and misunderstand his spirit by treating his words as matter-of-fact prose. His imagination is at work, and our symphathetic imagination must be at work too, if we would enter into his meaning. Death a shepherd—what a grim and bold inversion of a familiar metaphor! If this psalm is, as is probable, of a comparatively late date, then its author was familiar with many sweet and tender strains of early singers, in which the blessed relation between a loving God and an obedient people was set forth under that metaphor. “The Lord is *my* Shepherd” may have been ringing in his ears when he

said, "Death is *their* shepherd." He lays hold of the familiar metaphor, and if I may so speak, turns it upside down, stripping it of all that is beautiful, tender, and gracious, and draping it in all that is harsh and terrible. And the very contrast between the sweet relation which it was originally used to express, and the opposite kind of one which he uses it to set forth, gives its tremendous force to the daring metaphor.

"Death is *their* shepherd." Yes, but what manner of shepherd? Not one that gently leads his flock, but one that stalks behind the huddled sheep, and drives them fiercely, club in hand, on a path on which they would not willingly go. The unwelcome necessity, by which men that have their portion in this world are hounded and herded out of all their sunny pastures and abundant feeding, is the thought that underlies the image. It is accentuated, if we notice that in the former clause, "like sheep they are laid in the grave," the word rendered in the Authorized Version "laid," and in the Revised Version "appointed," is perhaps more properly read by many, "like sheep they are *thrust down*." There you have the picture—the shepherd stalking behind the helpless creatures, and coercing them on an unwelcome path.

Now that is the first thought that I suggest, that to one type of man, Death is an unwelcome necessity. It is, indeed, a necessity to us all, but necessities accepted cease to be painful; and necessities resisted—what do

118 TWO SHEPHERDS AND TWO FLOCKS

they become ? Here is a man being swept down a river, the sound of the falls is in his ears, and he grasps at anything on the bank to hold by, but in vain. That is how some of us feel when we face the thought, and will feel more when we front the reality, of that awful "must." "Death shall be their shepherd," and coerce them into darkness. Ask yourself the question, Is the course of my life such as that the end of it cannot but be a grim necessity which I would do anything to avoid ?

This first text suggests not only a shepherd but a fold : "Like sheep they are thrust down to the grave." Now I am not going to enter upon what would be quite out of place here : a critical discussion of the Old Testament conception of a future life. That conception varies, and is not the same in all parts of the book. But I may, just in a word, say that "the grave" is by no means the adequate rendering of the thought of the psalmist, and that "Hell" is a still more inadequate rendering of it. He does not mean either the place where the body is deposited, or a place where there is punitive retribution for the wicked, but he means a dim region, or, if I might so say, a localized condition, in which all that have passed through this life are gathered, where personality and consciousness continue, but where life is faint, stripped of all that characterizes it here, shadowy, unsubstantial, and where there is inactivity, absolute cessation of all the occupations to which men

were accustomed. But there may be restlessness along with inactivity ; may there not ? And there is no such restlessness as the restlessness of compulsory idleness. That is the main idea that is in the psalmist's mind. He knows little about retribution, he knows still less about transmutation into a glorious likeness to that which is most glorious and divine. But he conceives a great, dim, lonely land, wherein are prisoned and penned all the lives that have been foamed away vainly on earth, and are now settled into a dreary monotony and a restless idleness. As one of the other books of the Old Testament puts it, it is a "land of the shadow of death, without order, and in which the light is as darkness."

I know, of course, that all that is but the imperfect presentation of partially apprehended, and partially revealed, and partially revealable truth. But what I desire to fix upon is that one dreary thought of this fold, into which the grim shepherd has driven his flock, and where they lie cribbed and huddled together in utter inactivity. Carry that with you as a true, though incomplete thought.

Let me remind you, in the next place, with regard to this part of my subject, of the kind of men whom the grim shepherd drives into that grim fold. The psalm tells us that plainly enough. It is speaking of men who have their portion in this life, who "trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of

120 TWO SHEPHERDS AND TWO FLOCKS

their riches . . . whose inward thought is that their house shall continue for ever . . . who call their lands after their own names.” Of every such man it says : “ when he dieth he shall carry nothing away ”—none of the possessions, none of the forms of activity which were familiar to him here on earth. He will go into a state where he finds nothing which interests him, and nothing for him to do.

Must it not be so ? If we let ourselves be absorbed and entangled by the affairs of this life, and permit our whole spirits to be bent in the direction of these transient things, what is to become of us when the things that must pass have passed, and when we come into a region where there are none of them to occupy us any more ? What would some Manchester men do if they were in a condition of life where they could not go on ‘Change on Tuesdays and Fridays ? What would some of us do if the professions, and forms of mental activity, in which we have been occupied as students and scholars were swept away ? “ Whether there be knowledge it shall cease ; whether there be tongues they shall vanish away,” and what are you going to do then, you men that have only lived for intellectual pursuits connected with this transient state ? We are going to a world where there are no books, no pens nor ink, no trade, no dress, no fashion, no amusements ; where there is nothing but things in which some of us have no interest, and a God who “ is not in all our thoughts.” Surely we shall be “ fish

out of water " there. Surely we shall feel that we have been banned and banished from everything that we care about. Surely men that boasted themselves in their riches, and in the multitude of their wealth, will be necessarily condemned to inactivity. Life is continuous, and all on one plane. Surely if a man knows that he must some day, and may any day, be summoned to the other side of the world, he would be a wise man if he got his outfit ready, and made some effort to acquire the customs and the arts of the land to which he was going. Surely life here is mainly given to us that we may develop powers which will find their field of exercise yonder, and acquire characters which shall be in conformity with the conditions of that future life. Surely there can be no more tragic folly than the folly of letting myself be so absorbed and entangled by this present world, as that when the transient has passed, I shall feel homeless and desolate, and have nothing that I can do or care about amidst the activities of Eternity. Dear friend, should *you* feel homeless if you were taken, as you will be taken, into that world?

Turn now to

II. THE SUNNY LANDSCAPE DRAWN BY THE SEER.

Note the contrast presented by the shepherds. "Death shall be their shepherd." "The Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall be their shepherd." I need not occupy your time in trying to show, what has sometimes been doubted, that the radiant

122 TWO SHEPHERDS AND TWO FLOCKS

picture of the Apocalyptic Seer is dealing with nothing in the present, but with the future condition of certain men. I would just remind you that the words in which it is couched are to a large extent a quotation from ancient prophecy, a description of the Divine watchfulness over the pilgrim's return from captivity to the Land of Promise. But the quotation is wonderfully elevated and spiritualized in the New Testament vision; for instead of reading, as the Original does: "He that hath mercy on them shall lead them," we have here, "the Lamb which is in the midst of the Throne shall be their Shepherd," and instead of their being led merely to "the springs of water," here we read that He "leads them to the fountains of the water of life."

We have to think, first, of that most striking, most significant and profound modification of the Old Testament words, which presents the Lamb as "the Shepherd." All Christ's shepherding on earth and in heaven depends, as do all our hopes for heaven and earth, upon the fact of His sacrificial death. It is only because He is the "Lamb that was slain" that He is either the "Lamb in the midst of the Throne," or the Shepherd of the flock. And we must make acquaintance with Him first in the character of "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world," before we can either follow in His footsteps as our Guide, or be compassed by His protection as our Shepherd.

He is the Lamb, and He is the Shepherd—that suggests not only that the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ is the basis of all His work for us on earth and in Heaven, but the very incongruity of making one, who bears the same nature as the flock to be the Shepherd of the flock, is part of the beauty of the metaphor. It is His Humanity that is our guide. It is His continual Manhood, all through eternity and its glories, that makes Him the Shepherd of perfected souls. They follow Him because He is one of themselves, and He could not be the Shepherd unless he were the Lamb.

But then this other Shepherd is not only gracious, sympathetic, kin to us by participation in a common nature, and fit to be our Guide because He has been our Sacrifice and the propitiation of our sins, but He is the Lamb “in the midst of the throne,” wielding therefore all Divine power, and standing—not as the rendering in our Bible leads an English reader to suppose, on the Throne, but—in the middle point between it and the ring of worshippers, and so the Communicator to the outer circumference of all the blessings that dwell in the Divine centre. He shall be their Shepherd, not coercing, not driving by violence, but leading to the fountains of the waters of life, gently and graciously. And it is not compulsory energy which he exercises upon us, either on earth or in Heaven, but it is the drawing of a Divine attraction, sweet to put forth and sweet to yield to.

124 TWO SHEPHERDS AND TWO FLOCKS

There is still another contrast. Death huddled and herded his reluctant sheep into a fold where they lay inactive but struggling and restless. Christ leads His flock into a pasture. He shall guide them "to the fountains of waters of life." I need not dwell at any length on the blessed particulars of that future, set forth here and in the context. But let me suggest them briefly. There is joyous activity. There is constant progression. He goeth before ; they follow. The perfection of heaven begins at entrance into it, but it is a perfection which can be perfected, and is being perfected, through the ages of Eternity, and the picture of the Shepherd in front and the flock behind, is the true conception of all the progress of that future life. "They shall follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth"—a sweet guidance, a glad following, a progressive conformity ! "In the long years liker must they grow."

Further, there is the communication of life more and more abundantly. Therefore there is the satisfaction of all desire, so that "they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more." The pain of desire ceases because desire is no sooner felt than it is satisfied, the joy of desire continues, because its satisfaction enables us to desire more, and so, appetite and eating, desire and fruition, alternate in ceaseless reciprocity. To us, being every moment capable of more, more will be given ; and "to-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant."

There is one point more in regard to that pasture into which the Lamb leads the happy flock, and that is, the cessation of all pains and sorrows. Not only shall they "hunger no more, neither thirst any more"; but "the sun shall not smite them, nor any heat, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." Here the Shepherd carried rod and staff, and sometimes had to strike the wandering sheep hard: there these are needed no more. Here He had to move them sometimes out of green pastures, and away from still waters, into valleys of the shadow of death; but "there," as one of the prophets has it: "they shall lie in a good fold, and in a fat pasture shall they feed."

But now, we must note, finally, the other kind of men whom this other Shepherd leads into His pastures. "They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Aye! that is it. That is why He can lead them where He does lead them. Strange alchemy which out of two crimsons, the crimson of our sins and the crimson of His blood, makes one white! But it is so, and the only way by which we can ever be cleansed, either with the initial cleansing of forgiveness, or with the daily cleansing of continual purifying and approximation to the Divine holiness, is by our bringing the foul garment of our stained personality and character into contact with the blood which, "shed for many," takes away their sins, and, infused into their veins, cleanses them from all sin.

126 TWO SHEPHERDS AND TWO FLOCKS

You have yourselves to bring about that contact. "*They* have washed their robes." And how did they do it? By faith in the Sacrifice first, by following the Example next. For it is not merely a forgiveness for the past, but a perfecting, progressive and gradual, for the future, that lies in that thought of washing their robes and making them white in the blood of the Lamb.

Dear brethren, life here and life hereafter are continuous. They are homogeneous, on one plane though an ascending one. The differences there are great—I was going to say, and it would be true, that the resemblances are greater. As we have been, we shall be. If we take Christ for our Shepherd here, and follow Him, though from afar, and with faltering steps, amidst all the struggles and windings and rough ways of life, then and only then, will He be our Shepherd, to go with us through the darkness of death, to make it no reluctant expulsion from a place that we would fain continue to be in, but a tranquil and willing following of Him by the road which He has consecrated for ever, and deprived for ever of its solitude, because Himself has trod it. Those two possibilities are before each of us. Either of them may be yours. One of them must be. Look on this picture and on this; and choose—God help you to choose aright—which of the two will describe your experience. Will you have Christ for your Shepherd, or will you have Death for your shepherd? The answer to that question lies in the answer to the other—

have you washed your robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb ; and are you following Him ? You can settle the question which lot is to be yours, and only you can settle it. See that you settle it aright, and that you settle it soon.

Death, the Friend

“All things are yours . . . death.”—1 Cor. iii. 21, 22.

WHAT Jesus Christ is to a man settles what everything else is to Him. Our relation to Jesus determines our relation to the universe. If we belong to Him, everything belongs to us. If we are His servants, all things are our servants. The household of Jesus, which is the whole Creation, is not divided against itself, and the fellow servants do not beat one another. Two bodies moving in the same direction, and under the impulse of the same force, cannot come into collision and since “all things work together,” according to the counsel of His will, “all things work together for good” to His lovers. The triumphant words of my text are no piece of empty rhetoric, but the plain result of two facts—Christ’s rule and the Christian’s submission. “All things are yours, and ye are Christ’s.” So the stars in their courses fight against those who fight against Him, and if we are at peace with Him we shall “make a league with the beasts of the field, and the stones of

the field," which otherwise would be hindrances and stumbling-blocks, "shall be at peace with" us.

The Apostle carries his confidence in the subservience of all things to Christ's servants very far, and the words of my text, in which he dares to suggest that "the Shadow feared of man" is, after all, a veiled friend, are hard to believe, when we are brought face to face with death, either when we meditate on our own end, or when our hearts are sore and our hands are empty. Then the question comes, and often is asked with tears of blood, is it true that this awful force, which we cannot command, does indeed serve us? Did it serve those whom it dragged from our sides; and in serving them, did it serve us? Paul rings out his "Yes"; and if we have as firm a hold of Paul's Lord as Paul had, our answer will be the same. Let me, then, deal with this great thought that lies here, of the conversion of the last enemy into a friend, the assurance that we may all have that death is ours, though not in the sense that we can command it, yet in the sense that it ministers to our highest good.

That thought may be true about ourselves when it comes to our turn to die, and, thank God, has been true about all those that have departed in His faith and fear. Some of you may have seen two very striking engravings by a great, though somewhat unknown artist, representing Death as the Destroyer and Death as the Friend. In the one case he comes into a scene of wild revelry,

and there at his feet lie, stark and stiff, corpses in their gay clothing, and with garlands on their brows, and feasters and musicians are flying in terror from the cowed Skeleton. In the other he comes into a quiet church belfry, where an aged saint sits with folded arms and closed eyes, and an open Bible by his side, and endless peace upon the wearied face. The window is flung wide to the sunrise, and on its sill perches a bird that gives forth its morning song. The cowed figure has brought rest to the weary, and the glad dawning of a new life to the aged, and is a friend. The two pictures are better than all the poor words that I can say. It depends on the people to whom he comes, whether he comes as a destroyer or as a helper. Of course, for all of us the mere physical facts remain the same, the pangs and the pain, the slow torture of the loosing of the bond, or the sharp agony of its instantaneous rending apart. But we have gone but a very little way into life and its experiences, if we have not learnt that identity of circumstances may cover profound difference of essentials, and that the same experiences may have wholly different messages and meanings to two people who are equally implicated in them. Thus, while the physical fact remains the same for all, the whole bearing of it may so differ that Death to one man will be a Destroyer, while to another it is a Friend. For, if we come to analyse the thoughts of humanity about the last act in human life on earth, what is it that makes the dread

darkness of death, which all men know, though they so seldom think of it ?

I suppose, first of all, if we seek to question our feelings, that which makes Death a foe to the ordinary experience is that it is like a step off the edge of a precipice in a fog ; a step into a dim condition of which the Imagination can form no conception, because it has no experience, and all Imagination's pictures are painted with pigments drawn from our past. Because it is impossible for a man to have any clear vision of what it is that is coming to meet him, and he cannot tell "in that sleep what dreams may come," he shrinks, as we all shrink, from a step into the vast Inane, the dim Unknown. But the Gospel comes and says, "*It is a land of great darkness,*" but "*to the people that sit in darkness a great light hath shined.*"

" Our knowledge of that life is small,
The eye of faith is dim."

But faith has an eye, and there is light, and this we can see—One face Whose brightness scatters all the gloom, One Person Who has not ceased to be the Sun of Righteousness with healing in His beams, even in the darkness of the grave. Therefore, one at least of the repellent features which, to the timorous heart, makes Death a foe, is gone, when we know that the known Christ fills the Unknown.

Then, again, another of the elements, as I suppose,

which constitute the hostile aspect that Death assumes to most of us, is that it apparently hales us away from all the wholesome activities and occupations of life, and bans us into a state of apparent inaction. The thought that death is rest does sometimes attract the weary or harassed, or they fancy it does, but that is a morbid feeling, and much more common in sentimental epitaphs than among the usual thoughts of men. To most of us there is no joy, but a chill, in the anticipation that all the forms of activity which have so occupied, and often enriched, our lives here, are to be cut off at once. "What am I to do if I have no books?" says the student. "What am I to do if I have no mill?" says the spinner. "What am I to do if I have no nursery or kitchen?" say the women. What are you to do? There is only one quieting answer to such questions. It tells us that what we are doing here is learning our trade, and that we are to be moved into another workshop there, to practise it. Nothing can bereave us of the force we made our own, being here; and "there is nobler work for us to do" when the Master of all the servants stoops from His Throne and says: "Thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; have thou authority over ten cities." Then the faithfulness of the steward will be exchanged for the authority of the ruler, and the toil of the servant for a share in the joy of the Lord.

So another of the elements which make Death an

enemy is turned into an element which makes it a friend, and instead of the separation from this earthly body, the organ of our activity and the medium of our connexion with the external Universe, being the condemnation of the naked spirit to inaction, it is the emancipation of the spirit into greater activity. For nothing drops away at death that does not make a man the richer for its loss, and when the dross is purged from the silver, there remains "a vessel unto honour, fit for the Master's use." This mightier activity is the contribution to our blessedness which Death makes to them who use their activities here in Christ's service.

Then, still further, another of the elements which is converted from being a terror into a joy is that Death, the separator, becomes to Christ's servants Death, the uniter. We all know how that function of death is perhaps the one that makes us shrink from it the most, dread it the most, and sometimes hate it the most. But it will be with us as it was with those that were to be initiated into ancient religious rites. Blindfolded, they were led by a hand that grasped theirs but was not seen, through dark, narrow, devious passages, but they were led into a great company in a mighty hall. Seen from this side, the ministry of Death parts a man from dear ones, but, oh ! if we could see round the turn in the corridor, we should see that the solitude is but for a moment, and that the true office of Death is not so much to part from those beloved on earth as to carry to, and

unite with, Him that is best Beloved in the heavens, and in Him with all His saints. They that are joined to Christ, as they who pass from earth are joined, are thereby joined to all who, in like manner, are knit to Him. Although other dear bonds are loosed by the bony fingers of the Skeleton, his very loosing of them ties more closely the bond that unites us to Jesus, and when the dull ear of the dying has ceased to hear the voices of earth that used to thrill it in their lowest whisper, I suppose it hears another Voice that says: "When thou passest through the fire I will be with thee, and through the waters they shall not overwhelm thee." Thus the Separator unites, first to Jesus, and then to "the general assembly and Church of the first-born," and leads into the city of the living God, the pilgrims who long have lived, often isolated, in the desert.

There is a last element in Death which is changed for the Christian, and that is that to men generally, when they think about it, there is an instinctive recoil from Death, because there is an instinctive suspicion that after Death is the Judgment, and that, somehow or other—never mind about the drapery in which the idea may be embodied for our weakness—when a man dies he passes to a state where he will reap the consequences of what he has sown here. But to Christ's servant that last thought is robbed of its sting, and all the poison sucked out of it, for he can say: "He that died for me makes it possible for me to die undreading, and to pass

thither, knowing that I shall meet as my Judge Him Whom I have trusted as my Saviour, and so may have boldness before Him in the Day of Judgment."

Knit these four contrasts together. Death as a step into a dim unknown *versus* Death as a step into a region lighted by Jesus ; Death as the cessation of activity *versus* Death as the introduction to nobler opportunities, and the endowment with nobler capacities of service ; Death as the separator and isolator *versus* Death as uniting to Jesus and all His lovers ; Death as haling us to the judgment-seat of the adversary *versus* Death as bringing us to the tribunal of the Christ ; and I think we can understand how Christians can venture to say, "All things are ours, whether life or death " which leads to a better life.

And now let me add one word more. All this that I have been saying, and all the blessed strength for ourselves and calming in our sorrows which result therefrom, stand or fall with the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. There is nothing else that makes these things certain. There are, of course, instincts, peradventures, hopes, fears, doubts. But in this region, and in regard to all this cycle of truths, the same thing applies which applies round the whole horizon of Christian Revelation—if you want not speculations but certainties, you have to go to Jesus Christ for them. There were many men that thoug t there were islands of the sea away beyond the setting sun that dyed the western waves, but Colum-

bus went and came back again, and brought their products—and then the thought became a fact. Unless you believe that Jesus Christ has come back from “the bourne from which no traveller returns,” and has come laden with the gifts of “happy isles of Eden” far beyond the sea, there is no certitude upon which a dying man can lay his head, or by which a bleeding heart can be staunched. But when He draws near, alive from the dead, and says to us, as He did to the disciples on the evening of the day of Resurrection, “Peace be unto you,” and shows us His hands and His side, then we do not only speculate or think a future life possible or probable, or hesitate to deny it, or hope or fear, as the case may be, but we *know*, and we can say: “All things are ours . . . death” amongst others.

The fact that Jesus Christ has died changes the whole aspect of death to His servant, inasmuch as in that great solitude he has a companion, and in the valley of the shadow of death sees footsteps that tell him of One that went before. Nor need I do more than remind you how the manner of our Lord’s death shows that He is Lord not only of the dead but of the Death that makes them dead. For His own tremendous assertion, “I have power to lay down My life, and I have power to take it again,” was confirmed by His attitude and His words at the last, as is hinted at by the very expressions with which the Evangelists record the fact of His death: “He yielded up His spirit,” “He gave up the ghost,”

“He breathed out His life.” It is confirmed to us by such words as those remarkable ones of the Apocalypse, which speak of Him as “the Living One,” who, by His own will, “became dead.” He died because He would, and He would die because He loved you and me. And in dying, He showed Himself to be, not the Victim, but the Conqueror, of the Death to which He submitted. The Jewish King on the fatal field of Gilboa called his sword-bearer, and the servant came, and Saul bade him smite, and when his trembling hand shrank from such an act, the King fell on his sword. The Lord of life and death summoned His servant Death, and he came obedient, but Jesus died not by Death’s stroke, but by his own act. So that Lord of Death, who died because He would, is the Lord who has the keys of death and the grave, and in regard to one servant says, “I will that he tarry till I come,” and that man lives through a century, and in regard to another says, “Follow thou Me,” and that man dies on a cross. The dying Lord is Lord of Death, and the living Lord is for us all the Prince of Life.

Brethren, we have to take His yoke upon us by the act of faith which leads to a love that issues in an obedience which will become more and more complete, as we become more fully Christ’s. Then death will be ours, for then we shall count that the highest good for us will be fuller union with, a fuller possession of, and a completer conformity to, Jesus Christ our King, and that

whatever brings us these, even though it brings also pain and sorrow and much from which we shrink, is all on our side. It is possible—may it be so with each of us!—that for us Death may be, not an enemy that bans us into darkness and inactivity, or hales us to a judgment-seat, but the Angel who wakes us, at whose touch the chains fall off, and who leads us through “the iron gate that opens of its own accord,” and brings us into the City.

A Fight with Depression

Why art thou cast down, O my soul ; and why art thou dis-
quited within me ? hope in God ; for I shall yet praise Him Who is
the health of my countenance, and my God.—PSALM xliii. 5.

THESE words occur thrice, at short intervals, in this psalm and in the preceding one. They appear there twice, and here once. Quite obviously the division into two psalms is a mistake, for the whole constitutes one composition. The first part of each of the sections, into which the one original psalm is divided by the repetition of this refrain, is a weary monotone of complaint. The Psalmist is in circumstances of depression and disappointment, and he keeps ringing the changes over and over again upon his sad condition. But then he struggles up, as it were, to the height of questioning himself what all this trouble of soul and depression mean, and when he has got the length of questioning his mood instead of passively yielding to it, then he goes further and encourages himself—"Hope thou in God."

But again the wave of trouble rolls in, and sweeps away the flimsy barrier that he had put up. The weary round is gone all over again—the complaint and the enumeration of the sad things that befall him, and the expressions of his despondency. Then once more he lifts his head above water, and catches a glimpse of the light. Again he asks, “Why art thou cast down, O my soul?” But once more the climbing sorrow gets the better of him, and he wails his complaint all over again, and then, for the third time, he rises above it, and rebuilds his wall against the flood, and this time the barrier stands, and the flood is finally dammed back.

Unless we look, therefore, not only at the words themselves, but at this most instructive and beautiful fact of their recurrence, and at what separates the instances of their recurrence from one another, we miss the chief lesson of this Psalm. We note,

I. A DREARY MONOTONY OF COMPLAINT.

We all know the temptation of being overmastered by some calamity or some sad thought. We keep chewing the bitter morsel and rolling it under our tongues, so as to suck all the bitterness out of it that we can. Circumstances, no doubt, warranted the Psalmist’s despondency, but no circumstances warranted his tramping on and on and on, with weary reiteration, over and over again, in one mill-horse round of complaint. Why could he not speak it, and have done with it? You sometimes see upon the stage of a theatre

a procession represented, and the supernumeraries pass across the stage, and go round at the back and come in again at the other side, and so keep up an appearance of numbers far beyond the reality. That is like what we do with our sorrows. A fly has an eye, with I do not know how many facets, which multiply the one thing that it looks at into an enormous number ; and some of us have eyes made on that fashion, or rather, we manufacture for our eyes spectacles on that plan, by which we look at our griefs or our depressing circumstances, and see them multiplied and nothing but them. "That way madness lies." Absorption in one set of circumstances, however sad, and however crushing may be their weight, is neither wise, nor grateful, nor godly ; and it saps all the strength out of a man. The sky is never all cloud with us ; it sometimes is in the natural world, but the Christian's sky is never all full of gloom. And if we sinfully, although so naturally, give ourselves up to the monotonous contemplation of one sad set of circumstances, then we are forgetting that an abyss of blue lies at the back of the cloud, and that, in comparison with the serene and unstained infinitude beyond, the heaviest thunder-laden masses are but thin films of passing vapour. The Psalmist sets us an example to be avoided, in his triple repetition of the story of his grief and gloom. They have taken such possession of him that he cannot even vary his words. Twice he repeats, in the first and second sections : "They continually say

unto me, Where is thy God ? ” and twice he repeats, in the second and third sections : “ Why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy ? ” It was folly to ask this question twice. It was returning sanity thrice to ask : “ Why art thou cast down, O my soul ? ”

And so we hear the Psalmist advancing to a second stage, and that is,

II. A WISE SELF-QUESTIONING.

There are a great many of our griefs and moods and sorrows that will not stand that question. Like ghosts, if you speak to them, they vanish. It is enough, in not a few of the lighter and more gnat-like troubles that beset us, to say to ourselves : “ What art thou putting thyself into such a fume about ? Why art thou cast down ? ” For very many of them, to ask the question shows the impossibility of finding a reasonable answer to it. But even with regard to far more pressing and poignant griefs and burdens, fiery dragons and burning serpents which may sting and poison us, still the question is one that it is wise for a man to ask. We cannot control our thoughts nor our moods directly, but we can do a great deal to regulate, modify, and diminish those of them that need diminishing, and increase those of them that need to be increased, by looking at the reasons for them. And if a man will do that more habitually and conscientiously than most of us are accustomed to do it, in regard both to passing thoughts and to overpowering moods that threaten to become

unwholesomely permanent, he will regain a firmer control of himself—and that is the best wealth that a man can have.

“He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down without walls,” into which any roving Bedouin can break, and carry away, loot, and work his will. If we do not set a guard at the gates, and question the traveller that wants to come in, what his business is, and what is his right to enter, we shall be invaded by a host of very undesirable guests, and our lives will go all to pieces. Very many men who make failures morally, religiously, or even socially and commercially, do so because they have no command over themselves, and because they have not asked this question of each sly temptation that comes wheedling up to the gate of the soul, with whispering breath and secret suggestions—“What do you want here? What reason have you for wishing to come in?” “*Why* art thou cast down, O my soul?”—question yourselves about your moods, and especially about your sad moods, and you will have gone a long way to make yourselves better and happier people than you have ever been before.

Further, we have here

III. AN EFFORT TWICE FOILED AND AT LAST SUCCESSFUL.

I have said that the Psalmist asks this question three times. Three times, as it were, he clutches hold of the firm stay to which he can cling, and twice is swept away

from it ; and the third time he retains his grip. Yes, and that is often the case. In the Cathedral of St. Mark's, Venice, there is a mosaic that represents Christ in Gethsemane. You remember that, like the Psalmist, He prayed three times there, and twice came back, not having received His desire, but the third time He did receive it. The devout artist has presented Him thus : the first time prone on the ground, and the sky all black ; the second time raised a little, and a strip of blue in one corner ; and the third time, kneeling erect, and a beam from heaven, brighter than the radiance of the Paschal moon, striking right down upon Him, and the strengthening Angel standing beside Him. That was the experience of the Lord, and it may be the experience of the servant. Once I ask, twice I ask, and I do not receive an answer. "For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me." Thrice the Psalmist climbed, like some poor insect trying to get up a blade of grass. Twice he climbed and twice fell, but the third time he reached the top and kept there.

Brethren, do not give up the effort at self-control and victory over circumstances that tempt to despondency or to sadness. Even if you fail this time, still the failure has left some increased capacity for the next attempt, and God helping, the next time will be successful. So, remember the threefold repetition of this self-questioning and self-encouragement.

Lastly, we have

IV. THE CONQUERING HOPE.

The Psalmist's question to his soul is not answered. To put it was the first struggle to strip off the poisoned sackcloth in which he had wrapped himself. But his next word, his command to his soul to hope in God, completes the process of putting off the robe of mourning, and girding himself with gladness. He makes one great leap, as it were, across the black flood that has been ringing him round, and bids his soul : "Hope thou in God : for I shall yet praise Him, Who is the health of my countenance and my God." The one medicine for a disquieted, cast-down soul is hope in God. People say a great deal about the buoyant energy of hope bearing a man up over his troubles. Yes, so it does in some measure, but there is only one case in which there is a real bearing up over the troubles, and that is where the hope is in God. I have heard of men in a shipwreck who fastened the life-buoy round their waists, and it came up round their necks and choked them. There are hopes that lift men over many a trouble, and yet they are not the right sort, and they may ruin them at last.

"Hope thou ——" Yes ; but what am I to hope in ? That things will be better to-morrow ? Perhaps. That I shall get over the trouble and be stronger for it ? Possibly. That "the light affliction is but for a moment ?" Well ; some of them are *not* "but for a

moment.” “Hope thou in God!”—that is the secret. It is only the sunrise that scatters the mists; and it is only a hope “in God” that is sure to rise victorious over all conceivable troubles, and at last to turn despondency and disquiet into brightness and calmness. That is the one rainbow that lies above the fiercest hell of falling waters, foaming tortured in the cataract. The waters foam themselves away, “the things that are seen are temporal,” but the rainbow is always there, eternal. “Hope in God,” and the blacker the cloud, the brighter will be the colouring of the bow that spans it. “Hope in God,” and disquiet, and all the other ghosts of the night, vanish as at cockcrow.

But the hope that is in God must be a hope that is based upon a present possession of Him. “Hope thou in God; He is the health of my countenance, and my God.” It is only if a man has a present experience of the blessings of strong and all-sufficient help that come to him now, and can say, “My God, the health of my countenance,” that he has the right, or that he has the inclination or the power, to paint the future with brightness. A present experience of God as my very own, and all-sufficient for health and help and for the brightening of my face in all hours of darkness, is the only ground on which I can hope in Him for every future.

And we shall not attain either to that experience of God as ours, or to the hope that, springing from it, will triumph over all disquieting circumstances, without a

dead lift of effort. The Christian hope comes to no man without his definitely endeavouring after it ; and there is a great lack, amongst all Christian people, of realizing that it is as much their duty to cultivate the hope of the Christian, as it is their duty to cultivate any other characteristic of the Christian life. “ We desire that every one of you do show the same diligence, in order to the full assurance of hope unto the end.”

Thirst and Satisfaction

My soul **thirsteth** for Thee . . . My soul **shall** be satisfied. . . .
My soul followeth **hard** after Thee.—PSALM lxi. 1, 5, 8.

IT is a wise advice which bids us regard rather what is said than who says it, and there are few regions in which the counsel is more salutary than at present in the study of the Old Testament, and especially the Psalms. Their authorship has become a burning question, which is only too apt to shut out far more important things. Whoever poured forth this sweet meditation in the psalm before us, his tender longings for, and his jubilant possession of, God remain the same. It is either the work of a king in exile, or is written by some one who tries to cast himself into the mental attitude of such a person, and to reproduce his longing and his trust. It may be a question of literary interest, but it is of no sort of spiritual or religious importance, whether the author is David or a singer of later date, endeavouring to reproduce his emotions under certain circumstances.

The three clauses which I have read, and which are so

strikingly identical in form, constitute the three pivots round which the psalm revolves, the three bends in the stream of its thought and emotion. "My soul thirsts; my soul is satisfied; my soul follows hard after Thee." The three phases of feeling follow one another so swiftly that they are all wrapped up in the brief compass of this little song. Unless they in some degree express our experiences and emotions, there is little likelihood that our lives will be blessed or noble, and we have little right to call ourselves Christians. Let us follow the windings of the stream, and ask ourselves if we can see our own faces in its shining surface.

I. THE SOUL THAT KNOWS ITS OWN NEEDS WILL THIRST AFTER GOD.

The psalmist draws the picture of himself as a thirsty man in a waterless land. That may be a literally true reproduction of his condition, if indeed the old idea is correct, that this is a work of David's; for there is no more appalling desert than that in which he wandered as an exile. It is a land of arid mountains, without a blade of verdure, blazing in their ghastly whiteness under the fierce sunshine, and with gaunt ravines in which there are no pools or streams, and therefore no sweet sound of running waters, no shadow, no songs of birds, but all is hot, dusty, glaring, pitiless; and men and beasts faint, and loll out their tongues, and die for want of water. And, says the Psalmist, *that* is life, if due regard be had to the deepest wants of a soul,

notwithstanding all the abundant supplies which are spread in such rich and loving luxuriance around us—a long fierce thirst in a waterless land. I need not remind you how true it is that a man is but a bundle of appetites and desires, often tyrannous, often painful, always active. But the misery of it is that he does not know what it is that he wants; that he thirsts, but does not understand what the thirst means, nor what it is that will slake it. His animal appetites make no mistakes; he and the beast know that when they are thirsty they have to drink, and when they are hungry they have to eat, and when they are drowsy they have to sleep. But the sure instinct of the animal that teaches it what to choose and what to avoid fails us in the higher reaches; and we are conscious of a craving, and do not find that the craving reveals to us the source from whence its satisfaction can be derived. Therefore “broken cisterns that can hold no water” are at a premium, and “the fountain of living waters” is turned away from, though it could slake so many thirsts. Like ignorant explorers in an enemy’s country, we see a stream, and we do not stop to ask whether there is poison in it or not, before we glue our thirsty lips to it. There is a great promise in one of the prophets which puts the misinterpretation of our thirsts, and the mistakes as to the sources from which they can be slaked, into one beautiful metaphor which is obscured in our English version. The prophet Isaiah says,

according to our reading, "the parched land shall become a pool." The word which he uses is that almost technical one which describes the phenomenon known only in Eastern lands, or at least known in them in its superlative degree—the mirage, where the dancing currents of ascending air stimulate the likeness of a cool lake, with palm trees round it. And, says he, "the mirage shall become a pool," the romance shall turn into a reality, and the mistakes shall be rectified, and men shall know what it is that they want, and shall get it when they know. Brethren, unless we have listened to the teaching from above, unless we have consulted far more wisely and far more profoundly than many of us have ever done, the meaning of our own hearts when they cry out, we, too, shall only be able to take for ours the plaintive cry of one half of this first utterance of the Psalmist, and say, despairingly, "My soul thirsteth." Blessed are they who know where the fountain is, who know the meaning of the highest unrests in their own souls, and can go on with clear and true self-revelation to declare: "My soul thirsteth for God."

That is religion. There is a great deal more in Christianity than longing, but there is no Christianity worth the name without it. There should be moral stimulus to activity, a pattern for conduct, and so on, in our religion, and if our religion is only this longing—well then, it is worth very little ; but it is worth a good deal

less, if there is none of this felt need for God, and for more of God, in it.

And so I speak to two classes of my hearers ; and to the first of them I say : dear friends, do not mistake what it is that you need, and see to it that you turn the current of your longings from earth to God ; and to the second of them I say : dear friends, if you have found out that God is your supreme good, see to it that you live in the constant attitude of longing for more of that Good which alone will slake your appetite.

“The thirst that from the soul doth rise
Doth ask a drink Divine,”

for unless we know what it is to be drawn outwards and upwards, in strong aspirations after “something afar from the sphere of our sorrow,” I know not why we should call ourselves Christians at all.

But, dear friends, let us not forget that these higher aspirations after the uncreated and personal good, which is God, have to be cultivated very sedulously and with great persistence throughout all our changing lives, or they will soon die out and leave us. There has to be the clear recognition, habitual to us, of what is our Good. There has to be a continual meditation, if I may so say, upon the all-sufficiency of that Divine Lord and Lover of our souls, and there has to be a vigilant and a continual suppression, and often excision and ejection, of other desires after transient and partial

satisfactions. A man who lets all his longings go unchecked and untamed after earthly good has none left towards heaven. If you break up a river into a multitude of channels, and lead off much of it to irrigate many little gardens, there will be no force in its current, its bed will become dry, and it will never reach the great ocean, where it loses its individuality, and becomes part of a mightier whole. So, if we fritter away and divide up our desires among all the clamant and partial blessings of earth, then we shall but feebly long for, and feebly longing shall but faintly enjoy, the cool, clear, exhaustless gush from the fountain of life. "My soul thirsteth for God"—in the measure in which that is true of us, and not one hair's-breadth beyond it, in spite of orthodoxy, and professions, and activities, are we Christian people.

II. THE SOUL THAT THIRSTS AFTER GOD IS SATISFIED.

The psalmist, by the magic might of his desire, changes, as in a sudden transformation scene in a theatre, all the dreariness about him. The one moment it is a dry and barren land where no water is ; the next moment a flash of verdure has come over the yellow sand, and the ghastly silence is broken by the song of merry birds. The one moment he is hungering there in the desert ; the next, he sees spread before him a table in the wilderness and his soul is "satisfied as with marrow and with fatness," and his mouth praises God, Whom he

possesses, Who has come unto him swift, immediate, in full response to his cry. Now, all that is but a picturesque way of putting a very plain truth, which we should all be the happier and better if we believed and lived by, that we can have as much of God as we desire, and that what we have of Him will be enough.

We can have as much of God as we desire. There is a quest which finds its object with absolute certainty, and which finds its object simultaneously with the quest. And these two things, the certainty and the immediateness with which the thirst of the soul after God passes into a satisfied fruition of the soul in God, are what are taught us in our text; and what if we comply with the conditions we may have as our own blessed experience. There is one search about which it is true that it never fails to find. The certainty that the soul thirsting after God shall be satisfied with God, results at once from His nearness to us, and His infinite willingness to give Himself, which He is only prevented from carrying, into act by our obstinate refusal to open our hearts by desire. It takes all a man's indifference to keep God out of his heart, "for in Him we live, and move, and have our being," and that Divine love, which Christianity teaches us to see on the throne of the universe, is but infinite longing for self-communication. That is the definition of true love always, and they fearfully mistake its essence, and take the lower and

spurious forms of it for the higher and nobler, who think of love as being what, alas! it often is, in our imperfect lives, a fierce desire to have for our very own the thing or person beloved. But that is a second rate kind of love. God's love is an infinite desire to give Himself. If only we open our hearts—and nothing opens them so wide as longing—He will pour in, as surely as the atmosphere streams in through every chink and cranny, as surely as if some great black rock that stands on the margin of the sea is blasted away, the waters will flood over the sands behind it. So unless we keep God out, by not wishing Him in, in He will come.

As swift as Marconi's wireless message across the Atlantic and its answer; so immediate is the response from Heaven to the desire from earth. What a contrast that is to all our experiences! Is there anything else about which we can say, "I am quite sure that if I want it, I shall have it?" I am quite sure that *when* I want it, I have it? Nothing. Earthly goods are like the wells in the desert to which the Bedouins have to go, with empty water-skins, many a day's journey, and it comes to be a fight between the physical endurance of the traveller and the weary distance between him and the spring. Many a man's bones, and many a camel's, lie on the track to the wells, who lay down gasping and black-lipped, and died before they reached them. We all know what it is

to have longing desires which have cost us many efforts, and efforts and desires have both been in vain. Is it not blessed to be sure that there is One Whom to long for is immediately to possess ?

Then there is the other thought here, too, that when we have God we have enough. That is not true about anything else. God forbid that one should depreciate the wise adaptation of the earthly goods to human needs which runs all through every life ; but all that recognized, still we come back to this, that there is nothing here, nothing except God Himself, that will fill all the corners of a human heart. There is always something lacking in all other satisfactions. They address themselves to sides, and angles, and faces of our complex nature ; they leave all the others unsatisfied. The table that is spread in the world at which, if I might use so violent a figure, our various longings and capacities seat themselves as guests, always fails to provide for some of them, and whilst some, and those especially of the lower type, are feasting full, there sits by their side another guest, who finds nothing on the table to satisfy his hunger. But if my soul thirsts for God, "my soul shall be satisfied" when I get Him. The prophet Isaiah modifies this figure in the great word of invitation which pealed out from him, where he cries : "Ho ! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters." But that figure is not enough for him. That metaphor, blessed as it is, does not exhaust the facts ; and so he

goes on, "yea, come, buy wine"—and that is not enough for him, that does not exhaust the facts. Therefore he adds, "and milk." Water, wine, and milk; all forms of the draughts that slake the thirsts of humanity, are found in God himself, and he who has Him needs seek nothing besides.

Lastly—

III. THE SOUL THAT IS SATISFIED WITH GOD IMMEDIATELY RENEWS ITS QUEST.

"My soul followeth hard after Thee," The two things come together, longing and fruition. Fruition begets longing, and there is a swift and blessed alternation, or rather co-existence, of the two. Joyful consciousness of possession and eager anticipation of larger bestowments are blended still more closely, if we adhere to the original meaning of the words of this last clause, than they are in our translation, for the psalm really reads, "My soul cleaveth after Thee." In the word "cleaveth" is expressed adhesion, like that of the limpet to the rock, conscious union, blessed possession; and in the other word, "after Thee," is expressed the pressing onwards for more and yet more. But now contrast that with the issue of all other methods of satisfying human appetites, be they lower or be they higher. They result either in satiety or in a tyrannical, diseased increase of appetite faster than the power of satisfying it increases. The man who follows after other good than God, has at the

end to say, "I am sick tired of it, and it has lost all power to draw me," or he has to say, "I ravenously long for more of it, and I cannot get any more." "He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver, nor he that loveth abundance with increase." You have to increase the dose of the narcotic, and as you increase the dose, it loses its power, and the less you can do without it, the less it does for you. But to drink into the one God slakes all thirsts, and because He is infinite and our capacity for receiving Him may be indefinitely expanded; therefore, "Age cannot wither, nor custom stale 'His' infinite variety"; but the more we have of God, the more we long for Him, and the more we long for Him, the more we possess Him.

Brethren, these are the possibilities of the Christian life; being *its* possibilities they are *our* obligations. The psalmist's words may well be turned by us into self-examining interrogations, and we may—God grant that we do—all ask ourselves; "Do I thus thirst after God?" "Have I learnt that, notwithstanding all supplies, this world without Him is a waterless desert? Have I experienced that whilst I call He answers, and that the water flows in as soon as I open my heart? And do I know the happy birth of fresh longings out of every fruition, and what it is to go further and further into the blessed land, and into my elastic heart receive more and more of the ever blessed God?" These three clauses not only set forth the ideal for the Christian life here,

but they carry in themselves the foreshadowing of the life hereafter. For surely such a merely physical accident as death cannot be supposed to break this golden sequence if it has run through life. Surely this partial and progressive possession of an Infinite Good, by a nature capable of indefinitely increasing appropriation of, and approximation to, it, is the prophecy of its own eternal continuance. So long as the fountain springs, the thirsty lips will drink. God's servants will live till God dies. The Christian life will go on, here and hereafter, till it has reached the limits of its own capacity of expansion, and has exhausted God. "The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life."

A Song of Faith

He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.—PSALM xci. 1.

I HAVE read this verse, but I desire to deal, not with it merely, but with the whole of the Psalm, of which it is the introduction. The one theme of it is the security and absolute immunity from mortal ills, which belong to those that dwell in God. That one thought is worked out with wonderful force and variety. The singer is borne aloft on the two wings of devout confidence and poetic imagination, and when these two beat in unison, they lift a man high. If we try to follow him as he soars, perhaps we too, in some measure, may be raised above the cares and sorrows of this low-thoughted earth.

One preliminary remark I must make, and that is, that throughout the psalm there is a very remarkable alternation of speakers. It begins with, "*I* will say of the Lord"; there immediately follows, "*He* shall deliver thee"; and so on. And at the end, the person who had spoken first as "*I*," and been spoken *to* as

“ thou ” and “ thee,” is spoken *of* by yet another voice, which says, “ He has set His love upon me.” That remarkable and dramatic alternation of speakers is yet more conspicuous in the original than it appears in our Authorized Version, because, imbedded in the very middle of that second portion, in which “ thou ” is the prevailing word, we have a verse which, as it stands in the Authorized Version, is bewildering, and scarcely intelligible without a great deal of ekeing out—“ because thou hast made the Lord, which is my Refuge, even the Most High, thy habitation.” We get lost amidst the “ mys ” and the “ thys,” but the Revised Version, following the original, clears the matter up, for it reads thus: “ Thou, Lord, art my Refuge.” There speaks the first voice, coming in again with its “ my,” and then the second voice once more responds: “ Thou hast made the Lord thy habitation, there shall no evil befall thee.” So twice we have the solitary profession of personal faith, twice responded to by a stream of great assurances, and these are finally confirmed and enlarged by the voice of God Himself.

First, then, we have here

I. THE SOLITARY VOICE OF FAITH.

The words that I have read as my text, which stand as the introduction to the psalm, are the expression in the most general form of that great truth which it is all intended to enforce and to illustrate. They are chosen with exquisite beauty and felicity: “ He that

dwellleth in the secret place of the Most High"—how high up that "secret place" must be! how deep the silence up there! how pure the air! How far above the poisonous mists that cling to the low-lying swamps, how far out of the reach of the arrows or shots of the foe-man is he that dwellleth with God by communion, by constancy of desire, by aspiration, and by clear recognition of the Divine goal of all his efforts in the midst of his most strenuous and distracting work, and his most crushing and exhausting sorrows! "He that dwellleth" thus, "in the secret place of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty"—and since He is Almighty, the long shadow that that great rock casts will shelter him who keeps beneath it from the burning rays of the fiery sunshine, in every "weary land." The plain English of the highly imaginative words is, Let me keep myself in touch with God, and I keep myself master of all things, and secure from the evil that is in evil.

That is the general truth, but religious commonplaces lose their power by their generality, and in order to give them force we must point them to a personal application. So the Psalmist, encouraged by his contemplation of that broad universal principle, takes it for his own, and brings "I" and "my" into it, and that changes it from a toothless, useless, threadbare commonplace, which a man may have in his creed without its doing him one morsel of good, into a living experience. "*I* will say

of the Lord, He is *my* Rock and *my* Fortress ; *my* God, in Whom *I* will trust." Do *we* say that ? Have we translated the universal into the particular ? Has the contemplation of the most wide-stretching truth encouraged us to grasp it and make it our very own ? To do so gives gloss to the threadbare, freshness to the trite and familiar, beauty and force to the commonplace. And there is no religion which is not the appropriation to my very own self of the great truths that are meant for the world. So much of Niagara as you turn into your own sluice will irrigate your barren fields and slake your thirst, and all the rest, as far as you are concerned, is waste. It is useless to say, however solemnly, and with however entire assent of the understanding, " he that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty "—unless you take the further step, and in your own needs and sorrows, in your own hours of weakness and of stress when the enemy is coming in like a flood, say "*my* Fortress, *my* Strength, *my* God in Whom *I* will trust."

Next we come to

II. THE GREAT ASSURANCES WHICH ANSWER TO THIS SOLITARY VOICE OF FAITH.

Whether the psalm was intended to be sung by any kind of alternate responsive choir and solo voice or no, we need not consider ; at all events, it is laid out in that structure which I have already pointed out. So when the single soul has brought itself up, by the effort of its

faith, to make God its Refuge and its Fortress, then there come pouring in upon it, as if spoken from without, but yet brought near to it and made audible for it by its own personal faith, a whole host of great certainties.

“Surely He shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence.” The “fowler” is in other places of Scripture taken as a metaphor for death; and obviously the thing that was chiefly, if not exclusively, in the psalmist’s mind here, was the assurance of protection from insidious threatening evils that affected physical life. The “pestilence” and the “fowler” stands for these.

Then there follows a beautiful description of the manner and condition of that Divine protection: “He shall cover thee with his feathers.” That carries us back to the old word about the eagle stirring up its nest, and bearing its young upon its pinions, and suggests the tenderness that is lodged in the might of that Divine nature; and how He, the loftiest, knows what it is to have paternal care over them that put their trust in Him. But we must not forget a yet more gracious expansion of the word when, in the course of ages, One caught up the echoes of the old, sweet metaphor, and said: “As a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings,” so I would have gathered thee. Christ turned away from the emblem of the fierce bird of prey, and, with lowly love, took up the emblem of the harmless,

domestic fowl to express the warmth, the security, of the relation of the loving servant to the Master-Lord.

But, further, we have to note that there is here, too, the condition on which the shelter of that strong pinion is ours. "He shall cover thee with His feathers," but not unless "Under His wings shalt thou trust," or, as the word had better be rendered in this connexion, "Under His wings shalt thou flee for refuge." What becomes of the chickens that are straying about the barnyard, when kites are in the sky or the fox lurking behind the wall? They are snapped up. What becomes of the Christian man that strays out of the protection of the covering wing, and by self-will, or failure of trust, or practical disobedience, or fixing the heart and desire on earthly things, gets away from his Defence and his Defender? What becomes of him? The snare of the fowler is not spread in vain, and he is caught and limed there. If you want to be guarded by Jesus, keep your hearts and minds close to Jesus. Further, the ground of security is laid, not in our faith, but in his faithfulness. "His truth"—that is to say, to use the old word which expresses the idea much better, "His troth—shall be thy shield and buckler." The ground of our conscious security is laid in His faithfulness to all His promises.

Now is all this true? Is it true, as the psalmist goes on to portray under the double figure of battle and pestilence, that the man who thus trusts is saved from wide-

spread calamities, which may be devastating the lives of a community ? If we look on the surface it is not true. Those that “ dwell in the secret place of the Most High ” will die of an epidemic, cholera, or smallpox, like the men beside them, that have no such abode. *Our* hearts have often risen in protest against such promises as this of my text, when those that have been “ dwelling in the secret place of the most High ” have been stealthily snared and swept away from us. But, for all that, brethren, it is true ; it is true. For suppose two men, one a Christian, another not, both of them suffering from the same epidemic, both of them dying from it. Yet the difference between the two is such as that we may confidently say of the one, “ He that believeth shall never die,” and of the other that he has died. It is irrelevant to talk about vaccination being a better prophylactic than faith. No doubt this psalmist was thinking mainly of physical life. No doubt, also, you and I have better means of interpreting and understanding Providence and its dealings, than he had, and for us the belief that they who “ dwell in the secret place of the Most High ” are immune from death, is possible and imperative, after a fashion far nobler and better than the psalmist could have dreamed.

I need point out to you how here, beautifully and picturesquely, the two metaphors of battle and disease are each parted into their two halves, one expressive of open, and the other of secret, assaults—“ the pestilence

that walketh in darkness " on the one hand, " the destruction that wasteth at noonday " on the other ; " the terror by night," of nocturnal assaults upon a defenceless camp, on the one hand, and " the arrow that flieth by day," on the other. Only let us take this to heart, that all manner of danger and assaults are included in the promise, and though sense seems to say that the promise is but as gossamer seen by moonlight, a beautiful dream with no substance in it ; yet a deeper perception of the reality of things tells us that to the hilt it is fulfilled, and that they who dwell in God shall never see death.

There follows, according to the rendering which I have already given, the glad " Yes " of the solitary soul. " For Thou, Lord, art my Refuge." That utterance of faith is even more condensed than was the former. As we have seen, the initial utterance of trust brought to the psalmist's consciousness the great and glorious promises of which I have been speaking. When they come into his consciousness, then the office of his faith is to grasp them. He has only the cheque, only the draft ; but it is as good to him as bullion. " For," says he—and note that " for "—" Thou, Lord, art my Refuge." That is to say, he listens to all the preceding promises, and smiles and says, " Yes, I know it is all true ; because Thou art my Refuge." And when he says that he is thinking both of God's character and of his own faith. Thou art my Refuge in Thyself, and

because I have chosen Thee to be so. When there come into our hearts and minds, in sequence to some poor utterances of our faith, perhaps in an hour when our hearts are very sore and our lives very dark, these great assurances of a present God and an immortal life, let us be sure that our faith further rises to grasp, and say Amen to, them, rooting itself in the assurance of what God is, and of what we have chosen Him to be. Samuel Rutherford says that God's promises are like the boughs of a tree bending over a river, for His half-drowned children to lay hold of. Let us see that, when they are suggested to our faith, our faith grasps them.

There follows a series of further promises, even greater than those that have preceded. "There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling," or, as it reads in the original "thy tent," suggesting the nomad life. We have two houses; a shifting tent, the frail structure of our earthly habitation, and a "house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens," which is God Himself. "Because thou hast made the Most High thy habitation there shall no evil . . . come nigh thy dwelling." If thou dwell in God thou dwellest in safety.

Then there follow other promises which regard the nomad, not as in his tent, but, as on the road; promises that he shall be kept in all his ways, promises that he shall not only be kept in his ways, but that on angel's hands he shall be lifted buoyant and safe over his diffi-

culties, and promises still greater than these, that in his conflict he shall be victor, and "shall tread upon the lion and the adder." There again we have the antithesis of open and secret hostility. In these promises of keeping in the active life, of buoying over difficulties and of victory over enemies, we have more than the preceding promises of immunity from danger. We are here on the verge of promises as to spiritual necessities and conflicts, and are being assured that "he that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High" may continue there, and yet be trudging along the rough road of life; and that, if we thus combine the inward peace of communion, and the effort of active life, we shall "be kept in our ways," and upheld in our ways, and have victory over the lurking foes that would wound our heel, and the open enemies that would rend our life.

We must remember Old Testament conditions when we read Old Testament promises, and we must apply New Testament interpretations to Old Testament assurances. When we read "there shall no evil befall thee," and think of our own harassed, tempest-tossed, often sorrowful lives, and broken, solitary hearts, we must learn that the evil that educates is not evil, and that the chastening of the Father's hand is good; and that nothing that brings a man nearer to God can be his enemy. The poison is wiped off the arrow, though the arrow may mercifully wound; and the evil in the evil is all dissipated.

Lastly, we have

III. A DEEPER VOICE STILL:

coming in, confirming and enlarging all these promises.

I can but gather up these final utterances in a few words. God Himself speaks, promising deliverance consequent upon fixed love. "Because he hath set his love upon Me, therefore will I deliver him." He is not going to fail in response to the love of His child's heart. As the word in the original suggests, when a poor man presses himself close up against the Divine breast, as a dog might against his master's limbs, or as one that loves might clasp close to himself the beloved, then God responds to the desire for close contact, and through such contact He brings deliverance.

Further, that Divine Voice promises elevation consequent on acquaintance with the Divine Character. "I will set him on high"—high above all the weltering flood of evil, that washes vainly round the base of the cliff—"because he hath known My name." Loving acquaintance with the revealed character of God lifts a man above earth and all its ills.

Further, there is the promise of Divine companionship consequent on sorrows. "I will be with him in trouble." Some of us know what that means, how we never got a glimpse of God until earth was dark, and how when a devastating flood, as it seemed, came sweeping over the fair gardens of our lives, we found, when it had gone back, that it had left fertility such as we had

never before been capable of. Night brings the darkness, and darkness brings the stars. Trouble rightly borne brings God, and any flood that bears Him into my soul, can be only a flood of blessing.

“With long life will I satisfy him, and show him My salvation.” Again I say, bring New Testament interpretation to Old Testament promises, for the evolution of God’s revelation of His will makes it wise to interpret the imperfect by the complete. “With long life will I satisfy him,” through the ages of eternity, and “show him My salvation” in the glories of an immortal life. Brethren, let us keep the conditions. Let us set our love on Him, know His will, call upon Him and listen for His answer, dwell in the secret place of the Most High, and He will fulfil His promises, then no evil shall befall us, but our earthly life will be filled with good, and will lead on to the more perfect manifestations of His saving power through the ages of eternity.

Forgiveness and Retribution

Thou wast a God that forgavest them, though Thou tookest vengeance of their inventions.—PSALM xcix. 8.

WHEN the prophet Isaiah saw the great vision which called him to service, he heard from the lips of the seraphim around the Throne the threefold ascription of praise: "Holy! holy! holy! Lord God of hosts." This psalm seems to be an echo of that heavenly chorus, for it is divided into three sections, each of which closes with the refrain, "He is holy," and each of which sets forth some one aspect or outcome of that Divine holiness. In the first part the holiness of His universal dominion is celebrated; in the second, the holiness of His revelations and providences to Israel, His inheritance; in the third, the holiness of His dealings with them that call upon His name, both when He forgives their sins and when He scourges for the sins that He has forgiven.

Two remarks of an expository character will prepare the way for what I have further to say. The first is that the word "though" in my text, which holds

together the two statements that it contains, is commentary rather than translation. For the original has the simple "and," and the difference between the two renderings is this, that "though" implies some real or apparent contrariety between forgiveness and taking vengeance, which makes their co-existence remarkable, whereas "and" lays the two things down side by side. The psalmist simply declares that they are both there, and puts in no such fine distinction as is represented by the words "though," or "but," or "yet." To me it seems a great deal more eloquent in its simplicity and reticence that he should say: "Thou forgavest them and tookest vengeance," than that he should say "Thou forgavest them though Thou tookest vengeance."

Then there is another point to be noted, viz., we must not import into that word "vengeance," when it is applied to Divine actions, the notions which cluster round it when it is applied to ours. For in its general use it means retaliation, inflicted at the bidding of personal enmity or passion. But there are no turbid elements of that sort in God. His retribution is a great deal more analogous to the unimpassioned, impersonal action of public law than it is to the "wild justice of revenge." When we speak of His "vengeance" we simply mean—unless we have dropped into a degrading superstition—the just recompense of reward which divinely dogs all sin. There is one

saying in Scripture which puts the whole matter in its true light, "Vengeance is Mine; I will repay," saith the Lord; the last clause of which interprets the first. So, then, with these elucidations, we may perhaps see a little more clearly the sequence of the psalmist's thought here—God's forgiveness; and, co-existing with that, God's scourging of the sin which He forgives; and both His forgiveness and the scourging, the efflux and the manifestation of the Divine holiness. Now just let us look at these thoughts.

Here we have

I. THE ADORING CONTEMPLATION OF THE DIVINE FORGIVENESS.

I suppose that is almost exclusively a thought due to the historical revelation, through the ages, to Israel, and crowned, as well as deepened, by the culmination and perfecting of the eternal revelation of God in Jesus Christ our Lord. I suppose the conception of a forgiving God is the product of the Old and of the New Testament. But familiar as the word is to us, and although the thing that it means is embodied in the creed of Christendom, "I believe . . . in the forgiveness of sins," I think that a great many of us would be somewhat put to it, if we were called upon to tell definitely and clearly what we mean when we talk about the forgiveness of sins. Many of us, prior to thinking about the matter, would answer "the non-infliction or remission of penalty." And I am far

from denying that that is an element in forgiveness, although it is the lowest and the most external, in both the Old Testament and the New Testament conception of it. But we must rise a great deal higher than that. We are entitled, by our Lord's teaching, to parallel God's forgiveness and man's forgiveness; and so perhaps the best way to understand the perfect type of forgiveness is to look at the imperfect types which we see round us. What, then, do we mean by human forgiveness? It is seen in multitudes of cases where there is no question at all of penalty. Two men get alienated from one another. One of them does something which the other thinks is a sin against friendship or loyalty, and he who is sinned against says, "I forgive you." That does not mean that he does not inflict a penalty, because there is no penalty in question. Forgiveness is not a matter of conduct, then, primarily, but it is a matter of disposition, of attitude; or, to put it into a shorter word, it is a matter of the heart, and even on the lower level of the human type, we see that remission of penalty may be a part, sometimes is and sometimes is not, but is always the smallest part of it, and a derivative and secondary result of something that went before. An unconscious recognition of this attitude of mind and heart, as being the essential thing in forgiveness, brings about an instance of the process by which two words that originally mean substantially the same thing come to acquire

each its special shade of meaning. What I refer to is this—when a judicial sentence on a criminal is remitted, we never hear any one speak about the criminal being “forgiven.” We keep the word “pardon,” in our daily conventional intercourse, for slight offences or for the judicial remission of a sentence. The King pardons a criminal; you never hear about the King “forgiving” a criminal. And that, as I take it, is just because people have been groping after the thought that I am trying to bring out, viz., that the remission of penalty is one thing, and purging the heart of all alienation and hatred is another; and that the latter is forgiveness, whilst the former has to be content with being pardon.

The highest type of forgiveness is the paternal. Every one of us that remembers our childhood, and every one of us who has had children of his own, knows what paternal forgiveness is. It is not when you put away the rod that the little face brightens again and the tears cease to flow, but it is when *your* face clears, and the child knows that there is no cloud between it and the father, or still more the mother, that forgiveness is realized. The immediate effect of our transgressions is that we, as it were, thereby drop a great, black rock into the stream of the Divine love, and the channel is barred by our action; and God’s forgiveness is when, as was the case in another fashion in the Deluge, the floods rise above the tops of the

highest hills; and as the good old hymn that has gone out of fashion nowadays, says, over sins:

“ . . . Like the mountains for their size,
The seas of sovereign grace arise. . . . ”

When the love of God flows over the black rock, as the incoming tide does over some jagged reef, then, and not merely when the rod is put on the shelf, is forgiveness bestowed and received.

But, as I have said, the remission of penalty *is* an element in forgiveness. Some people say: “It is a very dangerous thing, in the interests of Christian truth, to treat that relation of a loving Father as if it expressed all that God is to men.” Quite so; God is King as well as Father. There are analogies, both in paternal and regal government, which help us to understand the Divine dealings with us; though, of course, in regard to both we must always remember that the analogies are remote and not to be pressed too far. But even in recognizing the fact that an integral part of forgiveness is remission of penalty, we come back, by another path, to the same point, that the essence of forgiveness is the uninterrupted flow of love. Remission of penalty;—yes, by all means. But then the question comes, *what is the penalty of sin?* And I suppose that the deepest answer to that is, separation from God. But if the true New Testament conception of the penalty of

sin is the eternal death which is the result of the rending of a man away from the Source of life, then the remission of the penalty is precisely identical with the uninterrupted flow of the Divine love. The mists of autumnal mornings drape the sky in gloom, and turn the blessed sun itself into a lurid ball of fire. Sweep away the mists, and its rays again pour out beneficence. The man that sins, piles up, as it were, a cloud-bank between himself and God, and forgiveness, which is the remission of the penalty, is the sweeping away of the cloud-bank, and the pouring out of sunshine upon a darkened heart. So, brethren, the essence of forgiveness is that God shall love me all the same, though I sin against Him.

But now turn, in the next place, to

II. GOD'S SCOURGING OF THE SIN WHICH HE FORGIVES.

Look at the instances in our psalm, "Moses and Aaron among His priests. . . . They called upon the Lord and He answered them. Thou wast a God that forgavest them, and Thou tookest vengeance of their doings." Moses dies on Pisgah, Aaron is stripped of his priestly robes by his brother's hand, and left alone amongst the clouds and the eagles, on the solitary summit of the mountain, and yet Moses and Aaron knew themselves forgiven the sins for which they died those lonely deaths. And these are but instances of what is universally true, that the sin

which is pardoned is also "avenged," in the sense of having retribution dealt out to it.

I need not dwell upon this at any length, but let me just remind you how there are two provinces of human experience in which this is abundantly true: one, that of outward consequences, and another that of inward consequences. Take, for instance, two men, boon companions, who together have wasted their substance in riotous living. One of them is converted, as we call it, becomes a Christian, knows himself forgiven. The other one is not. Is the one less certain to have a corrugated liver than the other? Will the disease, the pauperism, the ruined position in life, the loss of reputation, be any different in the cases of the man who is pardoned and of the man who is not? No, the two will suffer in a similar fashion, and the different attitude that the one has to the Divine love from that which the other has, will not make a hair of difference as to the results that follow. The consequences are none the less Divine retribution because they are the result of natural laws, and none the less penal because they are automatically inflicted.

There is another department in which we see the same law working, and that is the inward consequences. A man does change his attitude to his former sins, when he knows that he is pardoned; but the results of these sins will follow all the same, whether he is forgiven or not. Memory will be tarnished, habits

will be formed and chain a man, capacities will be forfeited, weaknesses will ensue. The wounds may be healed, but the scars will remain, and when we consider how certainly, and, as I said, divinely, such issues dog all manner of transgression, we can understand what the Psalmist meant when, not thinking about a future retribution, but about the present life's experiences, he said, "Thou wast a God that forgavest them, and Thou tookest vengeance of their inventions." "The sluggard will not plough by reason of the cold, therefore shall he beg in harvest, and have n thing," and that will be his case whether he is forgiven, or not forgiven, by the Divine love.

So, dear friends, do not let us confound the two things which are so widely separated, the flow of the Divine love to us irrespective of our sins, which is the true forgiveness, and the remission of the penalty, the infliction of which may itself be a part of forgiveness. "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap," and he will reap it whether he has sown darnel and tares and poisonous seeds, of which he is now ashamed, and for which he has received forgiveness, or whether he has not asked nor received it.

Only remember that, if we humbly realize the great fact that God has forgiven us, we can, as they say, "take our punishment" in an altogether different spirit and temper, and it comes to be, not judicial penalty, but paternal chastisement, the token of love,

and of which we can say that "we are judged of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world."

Lastly, my text leads us to think of—

III. FORGIVENESS AND SCOURGING AS BOTH ISSUES OF HOLY LOVE.

Some people, in their narrow and altogether external view of Christianity, would divide between the two, and say forgiveness comes from God's love, and scourging comes from His holiness. But this psalm puts the two together, just as we must put together as inseparable from each other the two conceptions of holiness and of love. Now our modern notions of what is meant by the love of God are a great deal too sentimental and gushing and limp. Love is degraded unless there be holiness in it. It becomes immoral good nature, much more than anything that deserves the name of love. A God Who is all love, so much so that it makes no difference to Him whether a man is a saint or a sinner, is not a God to be worshipped, and scarcely a God to be admired. He is lower than we, not higher. But His holy love is like a sea of glass mingled with fire; the love being shot all through, as it were, with streams of flame.

This holy Love underlies the forgiveness of sins. To forgive may sometimes be profoundly right; it may sometimes be profoundly immoral. A general gaol delivery simply sets the scoundrels free; a universal amnesty is a failure of justice, and a very doubtful

182 FORGIVENESS AND RETRIBUTION

benefit. But the forgiveness, which is the issue of holy love, is a means to an end, and the end which it has in view is that, drawn by answering love to a pardoning God, we may be drawn from the sins which alienate us from Him. There is no such sure way of making a man forsake his sins as to give him the assurance that God has forgiven them. "Thou shalt be ashamed and confounded, and never open thy mouth any more, because of thy sins, when"—I smite? no—"I am pacified towards thee for all that thou hast done." "Thou wast a God that forgavest them," and in the very act of forgiveness, didst draw them from their sins.

That holy love, in like manner, underlies retribution. I have been speaking of that retribution mainly as it is seen by the working of natural law. It is none the less God's act, because it is the operation of the laws which He impressed upon His creation at the beginning. You have weaving machines in your mills that whenever a thread breaks, stop dead. Is it the machine or the maker that is to get the credit of that? God has set us in an order of things wherein, and has given us a nature whereby, automatically, every sin, as it were, stops the loom, and "every transgression and disobedience receives its just recompense of reward." But men sometimes say "that is Nature; that is not God." God lies at the back of Nature, and works through Nature. Although Nature is not God, God

is Nature. Therefore, it is "Thou" that "takest vengeance of their inventions." Let us, then, remember that retribution is a token of love, meant to drive us from our sins, just as forgiveness is meant to draw us from them. Our Psalmist had come the length of putting these two things together, forgiveness and retribution. We have reached further, and here is the New Testament enlargement and deepening and explanation of the Old Testament thought: "If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins," and, in the very act, "to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous."

Saints, Believers, Brethren

. . . The saints and faithful brethren in Christ.—COL. i. 2.

“**T**HE disciples were called Christians first in Antioch,” says the Acts of the Apostles. It was a name given by outsiders, and like most of the instances where a sect, or school, or party is labelled with the name of its founder, it was given in scorn. It hit, and yet missed, its mark. The early believers were Christians, that is, Christ’s men, but they were not merely a group of followers of a man, like many other groups of whom the Empire at that time was full. So they never used that name themselves. It occurs twice only in Scripture, once when King Agrippa was immensely amused at the audacity of Paul in thinking that he would easily make “a Christian” of him; and once when Peter speaks of “suffering as a Christian,” where he is evidently quoting, as it were, the indictment on which the early believers were tried and punished. What did they call themselves then?

I have chosen this text not for the purpose of speaking about it only, but because it gathers together in brief compass the three principal designations by which the early believers knew themselves. "Saints"—that tells their relation to God, as well as their character, for it means "consecrated," set apart for Him, and therefore pure; "faithful"—that means "full of faith" and is substantially equivalent to the usual "believers," which defines their relation to Jesus Christ as the Revealer of God; "brethren"—that defines their relation and sentiment towards their fellows. These terms go a great deal deeper than the nickname which the wits of Antioch invented. The members of the Church were not content with the vague "Christian," but they called themselves "saints," "believers," "brethren." One designation does not appear here, which we must take into account for completeness: the earliest of all—disciples. Now, I purpose to bring together these four names, by which the early believers thought and spoke of themselves, in order to point the lessons as to our position and our duty, which are wrapped up in them. And I may just say that, perhaps, it is no sign of advance that the church, as years rolled on, accepted the world's name for itself, and that people found it easier to call themselves "Christians"—which did not mean very much—than to call themselves "saints" or "believers."

Now then, to begin with,

I. THEY WERE "DISCIPLES" FIRST OF ALL

The facts as to the use of that name are very plain, and as instructive as they are plain. It is a standing designation in the Gospels, both in the mouths of friends and of outsiders ; it is sometimes, though very sparingly, employed by Jesus Christ Himself. It persists on through the book of the Acts of the Apostles, and then it stops dead, and we never hear it again.

Now its existence at first, and its entire abandonment afterwards, both seem to me to carry very valuable lessons. Let me try to work them out. Of course, "disciple" or "scholar" has for its correlative—as the logicians call it—"teacher." And so we find that as the original adherents of Jesus called themselves "disciples," they addressed Him as "Master," which is the equivalent of "Rabbi." That at once suggests the thought that to themselves, and to the people that saw the origination of the little Christian community, the Lord and His handful of followers seemed just to be like John and his disciples, the Pharisees and their disciples, and many another Rabbi and his knot of admiring adherents. Therefore whilst the name was in one view fitting, it was conspicuously inadequate, and as time went on, and the Church became more conscious of the uniqueness of the bond that knit it to Jesus Christ, it instinctively dropped the name "disciple," and substituted others more intimate and worthy;

But yet it remains permanently true, that Christ's followers are Christ's scholars, and that He is their Rabbi and Teacher. Only the peculiarity, the absolute uniqueness, of His attitude and action as a Teacher lies in two things : one, that His main subject was Himself, as He said, "I am the Truth," and consequently His characteristic demand from His scholars was not, as with other teachers, "Accept this, that, or the other doctrine which I propound," but "Believe in Me"; and the other, that He seldom if ever argues, or draws conclusions from previous premises, that He never speaks as if He Himself had learnt and fought His way to what He is saying, or betrays uncertainty, limitation, or growth in His opinions, and that for all confirmation of His declarations, He appeals only to the light within and to His own authority : "Verily, verily, I say unto you." No wonder that the common people were astonished at His teaching, and felt that there was an authority in it which the wearisome citations of what Rabbi So-and-So had said, altogether lacked.

That teaching abides still, and, as I believe, opens out into, and is our source of, all that we know—in distinction and contrast from, "imagine," "hope," "fear"—of God, and of ourselves, and of the future. It casts the clearest light on morals for the individual and on politics for the community. Whatever men may say about Christianity being effete, it will not be effete till the world has learnt and absorbed the teaching of

Jesus Christ; and we are a good long way from that yet!

If He is thus the Teacher, the perpetual Teacher, and the only Teacher, of mankind in regard to all these high things about God and man and the relation between them, about life and death and the world, and about the practice and conduct of the individual and of the community, then we, if we are His disciples, build houses on the rock, in the degree in which we not only hear but do the things that He commands. For this Teacher is no theoretical handler of abstract propositions, but the authoritative imposer of the law of life, and all His words have a direct bearing upon conduct. Therefore it is vain for us to say: "Lord, Lord, Thou hast taught in our streets and we have accepted Thy teaching." He looks down upon us from the Throne, as He looked upon the disciples in that upper room, and He says to each of us: "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them."

But the complete disappearance of the name as the development of the Church advanced, brings with it another lesson, and that is, that precious and great as are the gifts which Jesus Christ bestows as a Teacher, and unique as His act and attitude in that respect are, the name either of teacher or of disciple fails altogether to penetrate to the essence of the relation which knits us together. It is not enough for our needs that we shall be taught. The worst man in the world knows a

far nobler morality than the best man practices. And if it were true, as some people superficially say is the case, that evil-doing is the result of ignorance, there would be far less evil-doing in the world than, alas! there is. It is not for the want of knowing, that we go wrong, as our consciences tell us; but it is for want of something that can conquer the evil tendencies within, and lift off the burden of a sinful past which weighs on us. As in the carboniferous strata what was pliant vegetation has become heavy mineral, our evil deeds lie heavy on our souls. What we need is not to be told what we ought to be, but to be enabled to be it. Electricity can light the road, and it can drive the car along it; and that is what we want, a dynamic as well as an illuminant, something that will make us able to do and to be what conscience has told us we ought to be and do.

Teacher? Yes. But if *only* teacher, then He is nothing more than one of a multitude who in all generations have vainly witnessed to sinful men of the better path. There is no reformation for the individual, and little hope for humanity, in a Christ whom you degrade to the level of a Rabbi, or in a Church which has not pressed nearer to Him than to feel itself His disciples.

There was a man who came to Jesus by night, and was in the dark about the Jesus to Whom he came, and he said, "We know that Thou art a Teacher come from God." But Jesus did not accept the witness;

though a young teacher fighting for recognition might have been glad to get it from an authoritative member of the Sanhedrim. But He answered, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God." If we need to be born again before we see it, it is not teachers of it that will serve our turn, but One Who takes us by the hand, and translates us out of the tyranny of the darkness into the Kingdom of the Son of God's love. So much, then, for the first of these names and its lessons.

Now turn to the second—

II. THE DISCIPLES MUST BE BELIEVERS.

That name begins to appear almost immediately after Pentecost, and continues throughout. It comes in two forms, one which is in my text, "the faithful," meaning thereby not the reliable, but the people that are full of faith; the other, meaning the same thing, they who believe, the "believers." The Church found that "disciple" was not enough. It went deeper; and, with a true instinct, laid hold of the unique bond which knits men to their Lord and Saviour. That name indicates that Jesus Christ appears to the man who has faith in a new character. He is not any longer the Teacher who is to be listened to, but He is the Object of trust. And that implies the recognition, first, of His Divinity, which alone is strong enough to bear up the weight of millions of souls leaning hard upon it; and, second, of what He has done and not merely of what

He has said. We accept the Teacher's word ; we trust the Saviour's Cross. And in the measure in which men learned that the centre of the work of the Rabbi Jesus was the death of the Incarnate Son of God, their docility was sublimed into faith.

That faith is the real bond that knits men to Jesus Christ. We are united to Him, and become recipient of the gifts that He has to bestow, by no sacraments, by no externals, by no reverential admiration of His supreme wisdom and perfect beauty of character, not by assuming the attitude of the disciple, but by flinging our whole selves upon Him, because He is our Saviour. That unites us to Jesus Christ ; nothing else does. Faith is the opening of the heart, by which all His power can be poured into us. It is the grasping of His hand, by which, even though the cold waters be above our knees and be rising to our hearts, we are lifted above them and they are made a solid pavement for our feet. Faith is the door opened by ourselves, and through which will come all the Glory that dwelt between the cherubim, and will fill the secret place in our hearts. To be the disciple of a Rabbi is something ; to be the " faithful " dependent on the Saviour is to be His indeed.

And then there is to be remembered, further, that this bond, which is the only vital link between a man and Christ, is therefore the basis of all virtue, of all nobility, of all beauty of conduct, and that " whatsoever things are lovely and of good report " are its natural

efflorescence and fruit. And so that leads us to the third point—

III. THE BELIEVING DISCIPLE IS A "SAINT."

That name does not appear in the Gospels, but it begins to show in the Acts of the Apostles, and it becomes extremely common throughout the Epistles of Paul. He had no hesitation in calling the very imperfect disciples in Corinth by this great name. He was going to rebuke them for some very grave offences, not only against Christian elevation of conduct, but against common pagan morality ; but he began by calling them "saints."

What is a saint ? First and foremost, a man who has given himself to God, and is consecrated thereby. Whoever has cast himself on Christ, and has taken Christ for his, therein and in the same degree as he is exercising faith, has thus yielded himself to God. If your faith has not led you to such a consecration of will and heart and self, you had better look out and see whether it is faith at all. But then, because faith involves the consecration of a man to God, and consecration necessarily implies purity, since nothing can be laid on God's altar which is not sanctified thereby, the name of saint comes to imply purity of character. Sanctity is the Christian word which means the very flower and fragrant aroma of what the world calls virtue.

But sanctity is not emotion. A man may luxuriate

in devout feeling, and sing and praise and pray, and be very far from being a saint ; and there is a great deal of the emotional Christianity of this day which has a strange affinity for the opposite of saintship. Sanctity is not aloofness. "There were saints in Cæsar's household"—a very unlikely place ; they were flowers on a dunghill, and perhaps their blossoms were all the brighter because of what they grew on, and which they could transmute from corruption into beauty. So sanctity is no blue ribbon of the Christian profession, to be given to a few select (and mostly ascetic) specimens of consecration, but it is the designation of each of us, if we are disciples who are more than disciples, that is, "believers." And thus, brethren, we have to see to it that, in our own cases, our faith leads to surrender, and our self-surrender to purity of life and conduct. Faith, if real, brings sanctity ; sanctity, if real, is progressive. Sanctity, though imperfect, may be real.

IV. THE BELIEVING SAINTS ARE "BRETHREN."

That is the name that predominates over all others in the later portions of the New Testament, and it is very natural that it should do so. It reposes upon and implies the three preceding. Its rapid adoption and universal use express touchingly the wonder of the early Church at its own unity. The then world was rent asunder by deep clefts of misunderstanding, alienation, animosity, racial divisions of Jew and Greek,

Parthian, Scythian ; by sexual divisions which flung men and women, who ought to have been linked hand in hand, and united heart to heart, to opposite sides of a great gulf ; by divisions of culture which made wise men look down on the unlearned, and the unlearned hate the wise men ; by clefts of social position, and mainly that diabolical one of slave and free. All these divisive and disintegrating forces were in active operation. The only thing except Christianity, which produced even a semblance of union, was the iron ring of the Roman power which compressed them all into one indeed, but crushed the life out of them in the process. Into that disintegrating world, full of mutual repulsion, came One Who drew men to Himself and said, "One is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren." And to their own astonishment, male and female, Greek and Jew, bond and free, philosopher and fool, found themselves sitting at the same table as members of one family ; and they looked in each other's eyes and said, "Brother !" There had never been anything like it in the world. The name is a memorial of the unifying power of the Christian faith.

And it is a reminder to us of our own shortcomings. Of course, in the early days, the little band were driven together, as sheep that stray over a pasture in the sunshine will huddle into a corner in a storm, or when the wolves are threatening. There are many reasons to-day which make less criminal the alienation from one

another of Christian communities and Christian individuals. I am not going to dwell on the evident signs in this day, for which God be thanked, that Christian men are beginning, more than they once did, to realize their unity in Jesus Christ, and to be content to think less of the things that separate than of the far greater things that unite. But I would lay upon your hearts, as individual parts of that great whole, this, that whatever may be the differences in culture, outlook, social position, or the like, between two Christian men, they each, the rich man and the poor, the educated man and the unlettered one, the master and the servant, ought to feel that deep down in their true selves they are nearer one another than they are to the men who, differing from them in regard to their faith in Jesus Christ, are like them in all these superficial respects. Regulate your conduct by that thought.

That name, too, speaks to us of the source from which Christian brotherhood has come. We are brethren of each other because we have one Father, even God, and the Fatherhood which makes us brethren is not that which communicates the common life of humanity, but that which imparts the new life of sonship through Jesus Christ. So the name points to the only way by which the world's dream of a universal brotherhood can ever be fulfilled. If there is to be fraternity there must be fatherhood, and the life which, possessed by each, makes a family of all, is the life which He gives,

who is “the firstborn among many brethren,” and who, to them who believe on Him, gives power to become the sons of God, and the brethren of all the other sons and daughters of the Lord God Almighty.

So, dear friends, take these names, ponder their significance and the duties they impose. Let us make sure that they are true of us. Do not be content with the vague, often unmeaning name of Christian, but fill it with meaning by being a believer on Christ, a saint devoted to God, and a brother of all who. “by like precious faith,” have become Sons of God.

Prudence and Faith

And Amaziah said to the man of God, But what shall we do for the hundred talents which I have given to the army of Israel ? And the man of God answered, The Lord is able to give thee much more than this.—2 CHRON. xxv. 9.

THE character of this Amaziah, one of the Kings of Judah, is summed up by the chronicler in a damning epigram : “ He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, but not with a perfect heart.” He was one of your half-and-half people, or, as Hosea says, “ a cake not turned,” burnt black on one side, and raw dough on the other. So when he came to the throne, in the buoyancy and insolence of youth, he immediately began to aim at conquests in the neighbouring little states ; and in order to strengthen himself he hired “ a hundred thousand mighty men of valour ” out of Israel for a hundred talents of silver. To seek help from Israel was, in a prophet’s eyes, equivalent to flinging off help from God. So a man of God comes to him, and warns him that the Lord is not with Israel, and that the alliance is not permissible for him. But, instead of yielding to the prophet’s advice, he parries it with this

misplaced question, "But what shall we do for the hundred talents that I have given to the army of Israel?" He does not care to ask whether the counsel that he is getting is right or wrong, or whether what he is intending to do is in conformity with, or opposition to, the will of God, but, passing by all such questions, at once he fastens on the lower consideration of expediency—"What is to become of me if I do as the prophet would have me do? What a heavy loss one hundred talents will be! It is too much to sacrifice to a scruple of that sort. It cannot be done."

A great many of us may take a lesson from this man. There are two things in my text—a misplaced question and a triumphant answer: "What shall we do for the hundred talents?"; "The Lord is able to give thee much more than this." Now, remarkably enough, both question and answer may be either very right or very wrong, according as they are taken, and I purpose to look at those two aspects of each.

I. A MISPLACED QUESTION.

I call it misplaced because Amaziah's fault, and the fault of a great many of us, was, not that he took consequences into account, but that he took them into account at the wrong time. The question should have come second, not first. Amaziah's first business should have been to see clearly what was duty; and then, and not till then, the next business should have been to consider consequences.

Consider the right place and way of putting this question. Many of us make shipwreck of our lives because, with our eyes shut, we determine upon some grand design, and fall under the condemnation of the man that "began to build, and was not able to finish." He drew a great plan of a stately mansion; and then found that he had neither money in the bank, nor stones in his quarry, to finish it, and so it stood—a ruin. All through our Lord's life He was engaged rather in repressing volunteers than in soliciting recruits, and He from time to time poured a douche of cold water upon swiftly effervescing desires to go after Him. When the multitudes followed Him, He turned and said to them, "If you are counting on being My disciples, understand what it means: take up the Cross and follow Me." When an enthusiastic man, who had not looked consequences in the face, came rushing to Him and said: "Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever Thou goest," His answer to him was another pull at the string of the shower bath: "The Son of Man hath not where to lay His head." When the two disciples came to Him and said: "Grant that we may sit, the one on Thy right hand and the other on Thy left, when Thou comest into Thy Kingdom," He said: "Are ye able to drink of the cup that I drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized withal?" Look the facts in the face before you make your election. Jesus Christ will enlist no man under false pretences. Recruiting sergeants

tell country bumpkins or city louts wonderful stories of what they will get if they take the shilling and put on the King's uniform ; but Jesus Christ does not recruit His soldiers in that fashion. If a man does not open his eyes to a clear vision of the consequences of his actions, his life will go to water in all directions. And there is no region in which such clear insight into what is going to follow upon my determinations and the part that I take, is more necessary than in the Christian life. It is just because in certain types of character, "the word is received with joy," and springs up immediately, that when "the sun is risen with a burning heat,"—that is, as Christ explains, when the pinch of difficulty comes—"immediately they fall away," and all their grand resolutions go to nothing. "Lightly come, lightly go." Let us face the facts of what is involved, in the way of sacrifice, surrender, loss, if we determine to be on Christ's side ; and then, when the anticipated difficulties come, we shall neither be perplexed nor swept away, but be able quietly to say, "I discounted it all beforehand ; I knew it was coming." The storm catches the ship that is carrying full sail and expecting nothing but light and favourable breezes ; while the captain that looked into the weather quarter and saw the black cloud beginning to rise above the horizon, and took in his sails and made his vessel snug and tight, rides out the gale. It is wisdom that becomes a man, to ask this question, if first of all he has asked, "What ought I to do ?"

But we have here an instance of a right thing in a wrong place. It was right to ask the question, but wrong to ask it at that point. Amaziah thought nothing about duty. There sprang up in his mind at once the cowardly and ignoble thought : " I cannot afford to do what is right, because it will cost me a hundred talents," and that was his sin. Consequences may be, must be, faced in anticipation, or a man is a fool. He that allows the clearest perception of disagreeable consequences, such as pain, loss of ease, loss of reputation, loss of money, or any other harmful results that may follow, to frighten him out of the road that he knows he ought to take, is a worse fool still, for he is a coward and recreant to his own conscience.

We have to look into our own hearts for the most solemn and pressing illustrations of this sin, and I dare say we all of us can remember clear duties that we have neglected, because we did not like to face what would come from them. A man in business will say, " I cannot afford to have such a high standard of morality ; I shall be hopelessly run over in the race with my competitors if I do not do as they do." Or he will say, " I durst not take a stand as an out-and-out Christian ; I shall lose connexions, I shall lose position. People will laugh at me. What am I to do for the hundred talents ? "

But we can find the same thing in Churches. I do not mean to enter upon controversial questions, but as an instance, I may remind you that one great argument

that our friends who believe in an Established Church are always bringing forward, is just a modern form of Amaziah's question, "What shall we do for the hundred talents? How could the Church be maintained, how could its ministrations be continued, if its State-provided revenues were withdrawn or given up?" But it is not only Anglicans who put the consideration of the consequences of obedience in the wrong place. All the Churches are but too apt to let their eyes wander from reading the plain precepts of the New Testament to looking for the damaging results to be expected from keeping them. Do we not sometimes hear, as answer to would-be reformers, "We cannot afford to give up this, that, or the other practice? We should not be able to hold our ground, unless we did so-and-so and so-and-so."

But not only individuals or Churches are guilty in this matter. The nation takes a leaf out of Amaziah's book, and puts aside many plain duties, for no better reason than that it would cost too much to do them. "What is the use of talking about suppressing the liquor traffic or housing the poor? Think of the cost." The hundred talents block the way and bribe the national conscience. For instance, the opium traffic; how is it defended? Some attempt is made to prove either that we did not force it upon China, or that the talk about the evils of opium is missionary fanaticism, but the sheet-anchor is: "How are we ever to raise the Indian revenue if we

give up the traffic ? ” That is exactly Amaziah over again, come from the dead, and resurrected in a very ugly shape.

So national policy and Church action, and—what is of far more importance to you and me than either the one or the other—our own personal relation to Jesus Christ and discipleship to Him, have been hampered, and are being hampered, just by that persistent and unworthy attitude of looking at the consequences of doing plain duties, and permitting ourselves to be frightened from the duties because the consequences are unwelcome to us.

Prudence is all right, but when Prudence takes command and presumes to guide Conscience, then it is all wrong. In some courts of law and in certain cases, the judge has an assessor sitting beside him, an expert about some of the questions that are involved. Conscience is the judge, Prudence the assessor. But if the assessor ventures up on the judgment seat, and begins to give the decisions which it is not its business to give—for *its* only business is to give advice—then the only thing to do with the assessor is to tell him to hold his tongue and let the judge speak. It is no answer to the prophet's prohibition to say, “ But what shall I do for the hundred talents ? ” A yet better answer than the prophet gave Amaziah would have been, “ Never mind about the hundred talents ; do what is right, and leave the rest to God.” However, that was not the answer.

II. THE TRIUMPHANT ANSWER.

“The Lord is able to give thee much more than these.” Now, this answer, like the question, may be right or wrong, according as it is taken. In what aspect is it wrong? In what sense is it not true? I suppose this prophet did not mean more than the undeniable truth that God was able to give Amaziah more than a hundred talents. He was not thinking of the loftier meanings which we necessarily, as Christian people, at a later stage of Revelation, and with a clearer vision of many things, attach to the words. He simply meant, “you will very likely get more than the one hundred talents that you have lost, if you do what pleases God.” He was speaking from the point of view of the Old Testament; though even in the Old Testament we have instances enough that prosperity did not always attend righteousness. In the Old Testament we find the Book of Job, and the Book of Ecclesiastes, and many a psalm, all of which were written in order to grapple with the question, “How is it that God does *not* give the good man more than the hundred talents that he has lost for the sake of being good?” It is not true, and it is a dreadful mistake to suggest that it is true, that a man in this world never loses by being a good, honest, consistent Christian. He often does lose a great deal, as far as this world is concerned; and he has to make up his mind to lose it, and it would be a very poor thing to say to him, “Now, live like a Christian man, and if you are

flinging away money or anything else because of your Christianity, you will get it back." No ; you will not, in a good many cases. Sometimes you will, and sometimes you will not. It does not matter whether you do or do not.

But the sense in which the triumphant answer of the prophet is true is a far higher one. "The Lord is able to give thee much more than this,"—what is "more" ? A thousand talents ? No ; the "much more" that Christianity has educated us to understand is meant in the depths of such a promise as this is, first of all, character. Every man that sacrifices anything to convictions of duty gains more than he loses thereby, because he gains in inward nobleness and strength, to say nothing of the genial warmth of an approving conscience. And whilst that is true in all regions of life, it is most especially true in regard to sacrifices made from Christian principle. No matter how disastrous may be the results externally, the inward results of faithfulness are so much greater and sweeter and nobler than all the external evil consequences that may follow, that it is "good policy" for a man to beggar himself for Christ's sake, for the sake of the durable riches—which our Lord Himself expounds to be synonymous with righteousness—which will come thereby. He that wins strength and Christlikeness of character by sacrificing for Christ has won far more than he can ever lose.

He wins not only character, but a fuller capacity for

a fuller possession of Jesus Christ Himself, and that is infinitely more than anything that any man has ever sacrificed for the sake of that dear Lord. Do you remember when it was that there was granted to the Apostle John the vision of the throned Christ, and he felt laid upon him the touch of the vivifying hand from Heaven? It was "when I was in Patmos for the Word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus." He lost Ephesus; he gained an open Heaven and a visible Christ. Do you remember who it was that said, "I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ"? It was a good bargain, Paul! The balance-sheet showed a heavy balance to your credit. Debit, "all things;" credit, Christ. "The Lord is able to give thee much more than this."

Remember the old prophecy: "For brass I will bring gold; and for iron, silver." The brass and the iron may be worth something, but if we barter them away and get instead gold and silver, we are gainers by the transaction. Fling out the ballast if you wish the balloon to rise. Let the hundred talents go if you wish to get the "more than this." And listen to the New Testament variation of this Old Testament promise, "If thou wilt have treasure in heaven, go and sell all that thou hast, and follow Me."

“Never in Bondage”

We . . . were never in bondage to any man. How sayest Thou
Ye shall be made free ? —JOHN viii. 33.

“**N**EVER in bondage to any man” ? Then what about Egypt, Babylon, Persia, Syria ? Was there not a Roman garrison looking down from the castle into the very Temple courts where this boastful falsehood was uttered ? It required some hardihood to say, “Never in bondage to any man,” in the face of such a history, and such a present. But was it not just an instance of the strange power which we all have and exercise, of ignoring disagreeable facts, and by ingenious manipulation taking the wrinkles out of the photograph ? The Jews were perhaps not misunderstanding Jesus Christ quite so much as these words may suggest. If He had been promising, as they chose to assume, political and external liberty, I fancy they would have risen to the bait a little more eagerly than they did to His words.

But be that as it may, this strange answer of theirs

suggests that power of ignoring what we do not want to see, not only in the way in which I have suggested, but also in another. For if they had any inkling of what Jesus meant by slavery and freedom, they, by such words as these, put away from themselves the thought that they were, in any deep and inward sense, bondsmen, and that a message of liberty had any application to them. Ah, dear friends, there was a great deal of human nature in these men, who thus put up a screen between them and the penetrating words of our Lord. Were they not doing just what many of us—all of us to some extent—do: ignoring the facts of their own necessities, of their own spiritual condition, denying the plain lessons of experience? Like them, are not we too often refusing to look in the face the fact that we all, apart from Him, are really in bondage? Because we do not realize the slavery, are we not indifferent to the offer of freedom? “ We were never in bondage ”; consequently we add, “ How sayest Thou, Ye shall be made free ? ” So then, my text brings us to think of three things: our bondage, our ignorance of our bondage, our consequent indifference to Christ’s offer of liberty. Let me say a word or two about each of these.

First as to—

I. OUR BONDAGE.

Christ follows the vain boast in the text, with the calm, grave, profound explanation of what He meant:

“ Whoso committeth sin is the slave of sin.” That is true in two ways. By the act of sinning a man shows that he is the slave of an alien power that has captured him; and in the act of sinning, he rivets the chains and increases the tyranny. He is a slave, or he would not obey sin. He is more than a slave because he has again obeyed it. Now, do not let us run away with the idea that when Jesus speaks of sin and its bondage, He is thinking only, or mainly, of gross outrages and contradictions of the plain law of morality and decency, that He is thinking only of external acts which all men brand as being wrong, or of those which law qualifies as crimes. We have to go far deeper than that, and into a far more inward region of life than that, before we come to apprehend the inwardness and the depth of the Christian conception of what sin is. We have to bring the whole life close up against God, and then to judge its deeds thereby. Therefore, though I know I am speaking to a mass of respectable, law-abiding people, very few of you having any knowledge of the grosser and uglier forms of transgression, and I daresay none of you having any experience of what it is to sin against human law, though I do not charge you—God forbid!—with *vices*, and still less with *crimes*, I bring to each man’s conscience a far more searching word than either of these two, when I say, “ We all have *sinned* and come short of the glory of God.” This declaration of the universality and reality of the bondage

of sin is only the turning into plain words of a fact which is of universal experience, though it may be of a very much less universal consciousness. We may not be aware of the fact, because, as I have to show you, we do not direct our attention to it. But there it is ; and the truth is that every man, however noble his aspirations sometimes, however pure and high his convictions, and however honest in the main may be his attempts to do what is right, when he deals honestly with himself, becomes more or less conscious of just that experience which a great expert in soul analysis and self-examination made : “ I find a law ”—an influence working upon my heart with the inevitableness and certainty of law—“ that when I would do good, evil is present with me.”

We all know that, whether we regard it as we ought or no. We all say Amen to that, when it is forced upon our attention. There *is* something in us that thwarts aspiration towards good, and inclines to evil.

“ What will but felt the fleshly screen ? ”

And it is not only a screen. It not only prevents us from rising as high as we would, but it sinks us so low as to do deeds that something within us recoils from and brands as evil. Jesus teaches us that he who commits sin is the slave of sin ; that is to say, that an alien power has captured and is coercing the wrong-doer.

That teaching does not destroy responsibility, but it kindles hope. A foreign foe, who has invaded the land, may be driven out of the land, and all his slaves set free, if a stronger than he comes against him. Christianity is called gloomy and stern, because it preaches the corruption of man's heart. Is it not a gospel to draw a distinction between the evil that a man does, and the self that a man may be? Is it not better, more hopeful, more of a true evangel, to say to a man, “Sin dwelleth in you,” than to say, “What is called sin is only the necessary action of human nature.” To believe that their present condition is not slavery makes men hopeless of ever gaining freedom, and the true gospel of the emancipation of humanity rests on the Christian doctrine of the bondage of sin.

Let me remind you that freedom consists not in the absence of external constraints, but in the animal in us being governed by the will, for when the flesh is free the man is a slave. And it means that the will should be governed by the conscience; and it means that the conscience should be governed by God. There are the stages. Men are built in three stories, so to speak. Down at the bottom, and to be kept there, are inclinations, passions, lust, desires, which are all but blind aimings after their appropriate satisfaction, without any question as to whether the satisfaction is right or wrong; and above that a dominant will that is meant to control, and above that a conscience. That is the pyramid; and as by

the sunshine on the gilded top of some spire, the shining apex, the conscience, is illumined when the light of God falls upon it. And when a man is built in that fashion, and keeps to that fashion, then, and only then, is he free.

I need not remind you of how the metaphor of my text receives its most tragical and yet most common illustration and confirmation in the awful fact of the power of any evil thing, once thought or done by a man, to reproduce itself, onwards and ever onwards. It is a far commoner thing for a man never to have done some given evil, never to have got drunk, never to have stolen, or the like, than to have done it only once. I have heard of a mysterious illness, in which at first medical analysis detected with difficulty one single bacterion in a great quantity of blood. But in a few days, so had they multiplied that no drop could be taken anywhere from the veins which was not full of them. That is how men get under the slavery of any evil thing ; and habit becomes stronger than anything except that “strong Son of God, immortal Love,” whose Spirit can conquer even it. “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots ? Then may ye that are wont to do evil learn to do well.” The bondage is real and hard.

My text suggests to us that strange, sad fact—

II. OUR IGNORANCE OF OUR SLAVERY.

“We were never in bondage to any man,” said the

Jews. We are but too apt to repeat the empty boast, and as they forgot Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar, Antiochus and Cæsar, we forget our failures, our faults, our sins. We ignore them. Is not that, too, a plain fact of experience? A sadly large percentage of men never have really opened their eyes to the undeniable truth that sin has dominion over them. They go along on the surface of things, keeping to the shallows of human life, occupying themselves with their various duties and enjoyments, and they never know, just because they shut their eyes to facts, or rather turn their eyes away from facts—what is their real condition in God’s sight. Some of my present hearers are, in regard to this matter, what the old Puritans used to call “Gospel-hardened.” They have their hearts and minds, I was going to say water-proofed, by repeated application to them, as I am trying to apply them now, of truths which but add one more film to the layers between their hearts and the Gospel. Because they are so familiar with the words of our message, they all but lose the faculty of bringing its power into contact with themselves. Oh! if I could overcome that tendency which there is in all regular church and chapel-goers to make themselves comfortable in their corners, and suppose that the man in the pulpit is saying what he ought to say, and that they need not give much heed to his message, because they have heard it all before—if I could once get the sharp point of this great Christian

truth of our slavery under sin, through the manifold layers with which your heart is encrusted, you would find out the weight of a good many things that some of you think very phantasmal and of little consequence.

There is nothing about us that is more remarkable and more awful, when you come to think of it, than the power that we have, by not attending to something, of making that something practically non-existent. The great search-lights, that they now have on battleships, will fling a beam of terrible revealing power on one small segment of the vast circle of the sea ; and all the rest, though it may be filled with the enemy's fleet, will be lying in darkness. So just because we cannot get you to think of the facts of your slavery to sin, the facts are non-existent as far as you are concerned. Let me plead with you. Surely ! surely, it is not a thing worthy of a man never to go down into the deep places of your own hearts and see the ugly things that coil and wrestle and swarm and multiply there ! Ezekiel was once led to a place where, through a hole broken in the wall, there was showed him an inner chamber, on the walls of which were painted the hideous idols of the heathen. And there, in the presence of the foul shapes, stood venerable priests and official dignitaries of Israel, with their censers in their hands, and their backs to the oracle of God. There is a chamber like that in all our hearts ; and it would be a great deal better that we should go down, through the hole in the wall, and see

it, than that we should live, as so many of us do, in this fool's paradise of ignorance of our own sin. It is because we will not attend to the facts that we ignore the facts. The evils that we do, and that we cherish undone in our hearts, are like the wreckers on some stormy coast, that begin operations by taking the tongue out of the bell that hangs on the buoy, and putting out the light that beams from the beacon. Sin chokes conscience ; and so the worse a man is, the less he feels himself to be bad ; and while a saint will be tortured with agonies of remorse for some slight peccadillo, a brigand will add a murder or two to his list, and wipe his mouth and say, “ I have done no harm.” We are ignorant of our sin because we bribe our consciences, because we drug our consciences, because we will not attend to the facts of our own spiritual being.

That ignorance of our bondage is characteristic of the tone of mind of this generation. Things have changed in that respect, as in a great many others, since I was a boy. I do not hear now, from people who desire to unite themselves to Jesus Christ, the deep poignant penitence and confession of sin that one used to hear. I do not hear the facts of sin, its gravity and universality, preached from pulpits in the way it used to be. I notice in the ordinary, average man a tendency to think more about environment and heredity than about individual responsibility, and on

the whole a very much lowered sense of the depth and the power and the universality of transgression. And that is why, to a large extent, the Christianity of this generation is so shallow a thing as it is.

That brings me, lastly, to say a word about—

III. THE CONSEQUENT INDIFFERENCE TO CHRIST'S OFFER OF FREEDOM.

“ How sayest Thou, Ye shall be made free ? ” Of course, if they had no consciousness of bondage, there was no attraction for them in a promise of freedom.

That remark opens out two thoughts, on which I do not dwell. First, the ignoring of the fact of sin which is so common amongst us all to-day, makes it impossible to understand Christ and Christianity. Brethren, that great Gospel, and that great Lord who is the subject of the Gospel, have many other aspects than this. But this is the central thought as to it and Him, that it is the emancipation from sin, because He is the Emancipator. “ The spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach deliverance to the captives.” And wherever we find, as we do find, in many quarters to-day, that the central fact of Christianity, the Death for the sin of the world, is deposed from its place, there the life-blood is ebbing out of the Gospel. Historically, the beginning of almost all heresies has been the under-estimate of the fact of sin. As long as you dwell in the shallows of human experience, a shallow Christianity and a shallow Christ

will be enough for you. But when once you get to understand the depths of your own need, and the depths of your brother's need, then nothing less than the Christ that died to solve the problem, insoluble else, of how to emancipate the soul and the world from the tyranny of sin, will be enough for you. Once “the waters of the great deep are broken up,” and the floods are out, there is nothing for it but the Ark. It is not enough then to speak of a human Christ; it is not enough, when a man's conscience has been roused, not to exaggeration, but to clear sight, of what he is—it is not enough then to speak of an example Christ, or of a teaching Christ. Ah! we want more than that. We want “that which first of all I delivered unto you, how that Jesus Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures.”

And, brethren, just as the ignoring of the fact of sin makes the understanding of Christ and His word impossible, so it makes real reception of Him for ourselves impossible. Many men are brought near to Jesus by other roads; thank God for it! There are a thousand ways to the Cross, but it is the Cross that we must clasp, if in any true sense we are to clasp Christ. And there is all the difference between the superficial, partial, and easy-going profession of Christianity which is so common amongst us to-day, and the life and death clutching and clinging to Him which comes when, and only when, a man feels that the tyrant whom he

served as a slave, is close behind him, and that his only chance of freedom is to hold fast by the horns of the altar of the Sanctuary, and to cleave to the Christ in Whom, and in Whom alone, we are free indeed.

What a Good Man is and How he is Made

He was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost, and of faith.
—ACTS xi. 24.

WE know that Luke was a physician, for we are told so in Scripture. There is also a probably baseless tradition that he was a painter. However that may be as regards brushes, he was a painter with his pen, and had a keen eye and a deft hand to portray character. Here, in three swift strokes, we have a likeness of Barnabas. But Luke was a physician, too—a surgeon—and my text is a dissection, if I may so say, as well as a portrait. It begins with the surface—“He was a good man”; and then it cuts a little deeper—“full of the Holy Ghost.” That is why “he was a good man.” And then it goes deeper still—“and of faith”; and that is why he was full of the Holy Ghost. One has sometimes seen anatomical models, where one lifts off the top piece that represents skin and flesh, and lays bare the deeper-seated organs. Luke’s analysis here is somewhat like these. It

gives a vertical section, that discloses the strata—not only the grass, and the “light of laughing flowers” on the surface, but the underlying soils which nourish these. All that I wish to do is to stand by and note the uncovering of these three successive layers: “a good man,” “full of the Holy Ghost,” “full of faith.”

We have—

I. THE CHRISTIAN NOTION OF A GOOD MAN.

Amongst all the noble words that are prostituted by common use, and vulgarized in unthinking lips, there are few that are more prostituted and vulgarized than that great phrase, “a good man.” There is no better proof of the general lowness of morality than the ease with which that word is applied. You remember how our Lord once had occasion to rebuke a man who used it, as we so often use it, with no recognition of the awfulness and the sublimity that lie in it. He said, “Why callest thou Me good?” not repudiating the character, but rebuking the employment of the word as a mere complimentary appellation. Nowadays it is hung round the neck of the poorest creatures, if they have some touch of geniality or good nature about them, and even sometimes taken down to a lower depth than that. Now, it is very remarkable how very chary the New Testament is in the employment of this name. There are other titles which it prefers—“righteous,” “just,” “saints,” and the like. Seldom does it use the word “good”; and always as connoting certain qualities,

which will come out if I briefly remind you of the sort of man to whom it is applied here. Barnabas "was a good man," says Luke, and he says so in explanation of the large sympathy and superiority to narrow prejudice which enabled him to recognize, as soon as he saw it, the working of God's spirit in a strange form in that Gentile congregation that had been gathered together at Antioch. The rest of his life, so far as it is recorded for us in the Acts, is of a piece with this. He began his Christian career by the entire surrender of his possessions, so that thereafter, like Paul, he had to work for his living with his hands. Then he was the first of them all to recognize Saul of Tarsus as a true Christian. Then we have him eagerly stretching out his sympathies to this new Gentile Church in Antioch. Then we have him, with singular self-suppression and absence of anything like envy, going to seek Saul, to bring him into the work which he himself was doing. Then we have his entire consecration to the missionary cause, and association with Paul in his first journey, in the course of which we see his willing acquiescence in the swift growth of influence of the younger man, and his taking the second place without a moment's murmuring or hesitation. And then we have a breakdown, where "the contention was sharp between them," and an eclipse came over Barnabas for many years.

That is the New Testament notion of a "good man"; and although I have no desire to dwell at any length

upon this part of my subject, I wish to make one observation, and that is, that the special *differentia* of this character is, no heroic virtues, but a certain geniality, gentleness, beauty of tenderness, and self-suppression ; and to draw this conclusion, that unless our goodness is beautiful as well as good, it lacks its highest consecration. The wise old Greeks coined a phrase, " beautiful and good," and the two were so buckled together as to constitute but one conception. Now, that is where a great many good people go far wrong. They seem to think that the main thing is that they shall be righteous, just, pure. Yes, so it is ; but unless you take care to make yourself sweet as well as good, and attractive as well as austere, you have yet to learn what is the perfectest consecration and irradiation of a human character. " Scarcely for a righteous man will one die "—no, that evokes but little outgoing of sympathy and affection ; " yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die." See to it that your goodness is " lovely," as well as " of good report."

Another thought comes out of this New Testament conception of " a good man," as exemplified in the case of Barnabas, and that is, one does not need to be a faultless monster to be a good man in Heaven's eyes. Barnabas is an instance of very great failure in the case of a very good man. And though it, to a large extent, wrecked his usefulness, and overshadowed him for many a day with disastrous eclipse, yet he fought through it

somehow, and came out again into the light, and the last glimpse of him, years after the time of our text, is when he and Paul have made it all up, and Barnabas has been ashamed of himself, no doubt, and his error is forgotten and buried. Do you remember who it was that was a man after God's own heart? The man that committed that great sin in the matter of Bathsheba and Uriah. Superficial people say: "A pretty kind of man after God's own heart—adulterer, murderer, traitor to his companion-in-arms." Yes, he was all these, but, having fallen, he repented, and though he had fallen, struggled to his feet again, and set his face once more towards the goal on which he had so shamefully turned his back; and so, with tears and a humbled heart and a strengthened will, made even his sin contributory to his goodness. Therefore, brethren, for us to-day it remains as a great and blessed truth that God looks not only on our actions, but on our aspirations, and that the set of a life, the drift of its tendency, is recognized by Him. Although wild gusts of passion may sweep the surface in the opposite direction, and cross-currents may agitate it, yet a great, deep, dominant force is the thing that determines a life. Now, you Christian people, remember that, unless it can be written down of you and me, "a good man," we have no business to call ourselves Christians.

We come to the second layer, lifting off the first—"full of the Holy Ghost."

II. CHRIST'S WAY OF MAKING A GOOD MAN.

The characteristic gift and promise of Christianity is a Divine Helper, and help to mould our characters into conformity with the Divine will. Amongst our orthodox churches, we far too frequently put the vital centre of the Christian Revelation, in pardon, or, as it is called, "justification," and God forbid that I should even for a moment seem to diminish the importance of that. But, dear brother, your Christianity will be a most superficial thing, and may easily tend to become a minister of unrighteousness and not of righteousness, unless you keep clearly in view that pardon, "acceptance in the Beloved," and all the rest of what to many people constitutes the whole Gospel message, is but a means to an end, and that the end is that we should "walk not after the flesh but after the spirit," or, if you want it put into more modern words, not that we should be forgiven men, but that, being forgiven, we should be good men.

There is another common misapprehension amongst us which is often fostered by the kind of sermons that are preached, and the meditations that are indulged in, on this commemoration day of Pentecost, that the special gifts which are included in the gift of the Holy Spirit are those which are expressed by miracles and tongues on the one hand, or which are expressed by splendid endowments and exceptional intellectual or other gifts, on the other. So people will say that Paul

was inspired, or, in a modified fashion, that others of the great religious geniuses of the ages, Origen, Augustine, John Bunyan, were inspired. But my text is a concrete example of the great truth that it becomes all us Christian people to realize far more than we do, viz., that the chosen field in which the Spirit of God operates in the Church is neither that of transient, supernatural gifts, as they are called, nor that of the exceptional endowments of great saints, geniuses, teachers, or organizers, but that of the humble work—humble as our vulgar conceptions think it, but to Him the highest—of moulding and refining quiet, commonplace, ordinary people into the image of Jesus Christ. That is a grander thing than all the more—to the world's eye—magnificent gifts. "Whether there be tongues they shall cease"—be it so. "Whether there be knowledge it shall vanish away"—be it so. But the greater and more permanent gift is bestowed upon any poor soul that wants it, the gift of a Divine Power to mould heavy clay, and to shape it into an image of serene and perfect beauty. It is greater to make saints out of sinners like you or me than it is to make a Paul out of a saint, or to give the power of raising from the dead, or speaking with tongues. The gift which the Gospel brings is first and foremost the gift of the Divine Spirit, whose highest work is to change our earthliness into the likeness of our Lord, and so to make us "free from the law of sin and death."

Now, I do not mean to cast any kind of scorn or contempt upon the moral excellences of men who are not Christians; when I say that, taking it in the general, and looking at what constitutes goodness in its deepest aspect, according to which nothing is perfectly good except work done in obedience to, and love towards, God, there is no goodness possible for humanity, but on condition of the reception of its Divine Helper, the Strengtheners who comes to stand by our sides, to reinforce in us that which is feeble, to raise and support that which is low, to illumine that which is blind, that we may become what without Him we shall *never* be in its whole depth and sweep, good men after God's pattern.

I need only ask you to be honest with yourselves, to set before your consciousness your own inner basenesses and weaknesses, your own wavering resolutions and fragmentary strivings after good; the foiling of your noblest purposes which you have so often experienced. Do these not make you feel that if there is one thing that would be a gospel to you, it would be to assure you that there is a power not yourself—something more than “a stream of tendency,” not yourself, but working in you, which “makes for righteousness”? Brethren, any man who has ever honestly set himself to mend himself, and to get out of himself the evil spot that is in him, will leap to that promise, and feel, “Ah! that is what I want,” and all facile philosophical objections will be swept away like so much thin mist and cloud-

wrack before the north wind, when the great need is felt, which always is felt when a man honestly tries to make himself "a good man."

But let us note that the possession of that Divine Spirit, which makes men good, is a full possession; "*full* of the Spirit." Yes, a scanty gift will do little to make a good man. If a river has been evaporated away by summer heats, so that there is only a thread of water running down the broad, bleached bed of tumbled stones, there will be no scour in that thin thread, to sweep away any of the obstructions and litter that choke the channel, nor will there be any water to spare to fertilize the banks. It needs to be a river brimming from side to side that floats away the filth, and can be led off to irrigate and fertilize the pastures on either bank. A scanty possession of the Divine Spirit will never make a good man.

There is a possibility opened in my text, a possibility for us all, that the whole nature of us, heart, and mind, and will—and however else you may choose to label its several operations—shall be penetrated by this Divine influence. In another metaphor, we are told that the great work of Jesus Christ is to plunge us into the fiery baptism of the Holy Spirit. We are immersed in it; it dominates and pervades our whole nature. The two emblems mean the same. Here is an empty wine-skin, all hard and cracked; you pour in the sparkling benediction, and as you pour, it swells and smooths itself

out. Into our limp, flaccid, empty spirits there may come the quickening blessing of that outpoured gift, and the vessel may be filled. But that is not all. The wine-skin stretches to its utmost, and if more is poured in, the skin bursts and the wine is spilt. But *our* vessels are elastic, and the walls of our hearts can widen out, like the tent in the fairy story, according to their contents. Though full, we may be still further filled, and receive more of that of which already we have received as much as the moment's capacity makes possible. Such is the ideal ; what about the reality ? I have spoken of a broad stream, and a trickle of water down the middle of its dry bed. That the Church of Christ should be such as it is to-day, the Spirit of Christ being such as He is to-day and always, is the shame and the scandal of the church, the laughter of the world, the wonder of angels, and the sorrow of Christ.

And now there is one more word. We have to get down to the bottom layer of all—"full of the Holy Ghost, and of faith." There you come to the secret of the whole.

III. THE CONDITION OF BEING FILLED WITH THE DIVINE SPIRIT

is being full of faith. That is to say, trust Jesus Christ, and in that trust you are united to Him in such real, not forensic or artificial or theological fashion, that his life is communicated to you in the measure of your faith. That is the Gospel. Faith, about which we talk

so much, and often "darken counsel by words without wisdom," seems to me to be simply the outgoing of the spirit, in trust and lowly desire and conscious necessity, to that great Saviour. It is like the inflation of the lung that the life-breath may rush in, and it surely will.

Now, dear brethren, if this is the bottom layer, the underlying stratum of the whole section that we have been looking at, and if, beginning with the flowers on the surface, you come down to this at last—then the great practical lesson is that a Christian man or woman is solely responsible for the measure of the Spirit of God which he or she may realize. And that raises a serious question for us all. I have spoken about the contrast between the ideal and the reality. Ah! Whose fault is that? Our own; nobody else's. Not God's. On this Whitsuntide, when people are talking about a Pentecost, the world may well turn to us and say, "There *was* a rushing mighty wind, but it has gone all calm now. There were tongues of fire; they have all flickered out. Your gift was a transient gift." And what are we to say? Why, this—the gift was a perennial gift. It is to-day as really and as fully as it ever was. You Christian people sometimes, when you feel the contrast between the ideal and the reality, the fulness of the possibility and the emptiness of the realization, pray for a fuller outpouring of the Spirit of God, and a new Pentecost. You do not need to pray for fresh fire; the fire is burning if you will only let Him baptize you

in it. You do not need to pray for a rushing, mighty wind to sweep away stagnation and malaria; the wind is blowing, if only you will let it freshen your atmosphere and fill your sails. See that you take what you have, the Spirit in its fulness, lest there should be taken away from you, and from the church to which we belong, that which it seemeth we have. If you forget everything else that I have been saying, remember the three strokes of this portrait, and be sure of this, that if ever you are to be rightly called "a good man," it will be because, and only because, you are "full of the Holy Ghost and of faith."

The Original and the Copy— I. Imitative Miracles

And Peter said unto him, Æneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole ; arise, and make thy bed. . . .—ACTS ix. 34.

Peter . . . said, Tabitha, arise. . . .—ACTS ix. 40.

They stoned Stephen . . . and he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, “ Lord ! lay not this sin to their charge.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep.—ACTS vii. 60.

YOU will understand why I have ventured to isolate and connect these three fragments, if you will consider that likeness to Jesus is the all-comprehending law of Christian life, and that the thought of being like Christ in death is a pillow on which dying Christians lay quiet heads, and that perfectly to be like Christ is the great hope that fills with radiance the vast, dim future. I have put these texts together, because they have one feature in common—they show us how the first disciples consciously endeavoured to shape their Christian lives and works after the example of their Master, and to mould their deaths so that they should be conformable to His. Thus early had the Christian instinct been developed, that seeks after

likeness to Jesus as the all-sufficient aim, and that recognizes Him as giving in Himself the supreme law for life and companionship in death.

The first two of my texts come from the accounts of two miracles wrought in one journey by the Apostle Peter. In both of them the endeavour to assimilate his action to his Master's is plain. He remembered how a palsied man had been brought to Jesus, and been bid, "Arise, take up thy bed, and go into thy house." The similar sufferer that Peter healed was already in his house, but the Apostle tries to get as near his Lord's fashion of working as he can, and so he says, "Arise; *make* thy bed." The commandment was not only intended to demonstrate to the bystanders and to confirm to the patient the reality of the cure, but it was a touching token of how the Apostle's memory had gone back, and how he pleased himself by making even a small detail in his work as like Christ's as he could.

The same intention is equally obvious in the other instance. Peter remembered how our Lord had cleared a death-chamber of noisy, professional wailers, and so he put forth the true mourners from the upper room where Dorcas was lying dead. He remembered the very Aramaic words with which Jesus had raised Jairus' daughter, and which are preserved to us in the Gospel which, in some sense, is supposed to be his; and again, he pleased himself, in a naïve and innocent

fashion, by copying their very sound, and for that purpose availed himself of the Jewish, rather than of the Greek, name of the dead woman. Thinking of "Talitha cumi," he said to her, "Tabitha cumi"—the change of one letter. There were differences, of course—great differences, as significant as the resemblances, and I shall have a word or two to say about them presently—but the intentional likeness, the conscious imitation, is unmistakable. So Christ is the example for the life and work of the disciple.

Then, if we turn to our other text, the very same imitative impulse is at work there, in the solemn moment of death. For Stephen remembers how on the cross his Master had said: "Father, into thy hands I commend My Spirit," and he breathes a prayer in which the differences are as instructive as the resemblances: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." He remembers how his Model had said; "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," and although there was little ignorance to lighten the crime of the mob that stoned the servant, in comparison with the ignorance that alleviated the guilt of the rulers that crucified the Master, yet the servant says: "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge," and so, shaping his death after the pattern showed him on the Cross, he changes its grisly shape into the soft similitude of quiet slumber, "and when he had said this, he fell asleep."²

Now with that exposition of my purpose, I have really said nearly all that I wish to say. But we may expand the consideration of the two thoughts suggested by these instances, namely, that likeness to Christ is the aim of a true disciple in life, and that likeness to Christ is the comfort and victory of a true disciple in death; and I come now to deal with the former of these, reserving consideration of the latter to another occasion.

Likeness to Christ, then, is the aim of the true disciple in life and work.

One great peculiarity of the Christian system is that it entrusts very largely the task of moral perfection to two things, love and contemplation. We all know how subtly love assimilates, so that two lovers grow more and more like each other, in regard even to small peculiarities of tone and manner and trivial habits. It is not otherwise with regard to the love that is turned to Jesus Christ. We grow like Him in the direct measure of our love to Him. Similarly, contemplation assimilates. "We all, with unveiled face beholding and reflecting the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory." If our thoughts are habitually turned to Christ He will habitually diffuse Himself through our lives, and we shall be growingly fashioned after His likeness. The eye that gazes on the sun has a tiny sun painted on its orb. The face that turns to the glowing west is rud-

died with a reflected brightness. A man is moulded by his company, and if we keep company with Jesus Christ we shall inevitably, though not without effort, grow like him. Love, then, breeds likeness, and contemplation transforms.

But our texts have a special reference, and point to the way in which, in the work of the Christian life, the pattern of Jesus Christ tended to reproduce itself. Apart altogether from the comparatively unimportant points of mere detail in which that assimilating tendency was working in the instances before us, and which are interesting mainly as showing how strong the feeling was in the Apostle's own mind, let me suggest one or two points.

The Christian life is to copy Christ's quick compassion.

If we are living in the love and beholding of Jesus Christ, we shall learn from Him what Peter learned from Him, to cherish a swift sympathy with human miseries of all sorts, that does not wait to be asked in order to do its best to alleviate. If you will look at these two instances of Peter's miracles, you will see that in neither of the cases is there any sign that he was asked to do what he did. He "found" Æneas; they did not bring him as they brought the man to Jesus, and nobody said to him "cure this man, we pray you." But, seeing him there, Peter's heart welled up and welled over. The eye that beheld touched a heart that felt, and the heart that felt immediately

moved a hand that healed, and he said, "Æneas ! Jesus Christ maketh thee whole." He had learnt that sympathy, not only from communion with the Spirit of His Master, but from remembering the many times in which the Master Himself had healed unasked.

But let us remember that Christ's external, unbesought spontaneous gifts of a heart filled with love and a hand "open as day to melting charity," were but transient and small symbols of that great love which waited not for man's beseeching, nor tarried for men's cries ; but before they called had answered, and whilst they were yet speaking, had heard. For Christ Himself is the outcome of that unbesought, undesired, unexpected, and too often unbelieved, Divine love which is its own motive, and wells up, not because it is drawn out by any pumps and handles of human petitions, but because, deep down in the hidden abysses, there lies that overflowing fountain which must have a way, and must come to the alleviation of the sorrows, and especially of the sins, of us poor men. They who live near Jesus Christ ought to, and will, have a keener sensitiveness to the world's miseries than any besides. They who thus have caught the Spirit of the Lord that came, not because men asked Him, but because He loved them, will not wait to be impelled by anything but the sight of misery and the possession of power to relieve it. Jesus Christ not only came spontaneously, but He has to "pray us, with much entreaty, to receive the gift," and so His servants, who have caught His

spirit, have to learn to press upon men that which they know not that they need, and to carry to the world an undesired and unwelcome, and an often rejected, gift. If we are in loving touch with Jesus Christ, we shall look upon men as He did, and be eager to help them, whether they will accept or whether they will not. But if professing Christians go through this sad world with little feeling of its miseries, and little experience of the spontaneous impulse to lighten them, I would fain know what sign of Christianity their lives present.

But, again, the disciple is to copy Christ's care for the body as well as the soul. Peter had gone down to Lydda to look after the little church there, and to teach it the truth. He did not say, "Oh ! I do not look after Æneas and dead women ; I am here for a higher and sacred purpose, to preach Jesus Christ to dead souls," but he recognized that any form of human sorrow, corporeal or spiritual, was equally in his commission—ay, and in his power, to deal with. And so, if we are Christians, we shall not be lop-sided in our sympathies, nor fancy, as some people used to do, (and some of their descendants are alive still), that the Christian Church—or, rather, do not let us shelter ourselves under the vagueness of the collective term "church," but apply the thoughts to ourselves—that the Christian man or woman has little to do with mere physical and external sorrows. Have you and I nothing to do with the drink demon ? Is it no part of the responsibility of citizens who are also Chris-

tians to have regard to the conditions of life in the slums? Have we no commission to help to alter these conditions which make decency—to say nothing of refinement or Christianity—an impossibility? We ought, by virtue of living near to Jesus Christ, to be foremost in every work that bears on the bodies and bodily conditions, as well as on the souls, of men. And surely we are not so absurd as to fancy that we can chop the inseparable man—the individual—into two, and whilst his body is living like an animal, that his soul has much chance of being saved. Remember the Apostle-missionary who went down to look after the saints, and found his vocation in a palsied man and a dying woman.

The disciple is to copy Christ's self-surrender.

Is my work in any measure, or in any respect, worthy to be said to have been touched with that holy fire of Christ's example which purges all that it touches, and transforms dead rubbish into its own likeness? When I think that the climax of Christ's work was a Cross, I may well shrink from saying that my love to Him has moulded my work into any resemblance to His. Brethren, the thought is too solemn, and has too sharp a sting for each of us, to be much spoken about. I pray you, take to it your own hearts, and remember that unless our Christian life and our Christian activity are, in some measure, assimilated to our Master's, they have little right to the epithet of Christian.

I need only say a few words with regard to the diver-

gencies, which are as striking as the resemblances, between the servant's work and the Master's. "Æneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole. Never mind about me, Peter." Jesus Christ never pointed to anyone else, in heaven or on earth, as being the source of the power of which He was merely the channel ; the apostle had to do so. So let us hide ourselves behind our Lord. The prop, that holds up some great trophy to the eyes of the world, is behind the trophy, and hidden by it. The herald is not to blow his own name or praises through his trumpet, but his King's, and is forgotten when the royal progress has come. "He must increase, and I must decrease." Minister, teacher, Christian worker ! do not obtrude yourself in front of your Master. Never mind whether anybody sees you or not, as long as they see Him. It is blessed

"To fade in the light of the planet we love ;
To fade in its light, and to die."

In like manner, when Peter was with Dorcas, "he kneeled down and prayed " before he dared to speak the word of power, and, instead of copying his Master in laying his hand upon her before she came to life, which would have looked, as it did in the Lord's case, as if the hand communicated the vitality, he only put it out to help her like a brother, when the life had come. But yet, with unfaltering confidence, before he had made the experiment, he was so sure of the power that Christ had

given him that he said, "Jesus Christ *maketh* thee whole." So, brethren, if you expect other people to believe your word, speak it out as if you believed it yourself. For men, who, having little personal experience of Christ's healing power, have but little confidence in announcing it to others, will have the fate of the seven sons of Sceva, on whom the spirit that they tried to exorcise turned, and said, "Jesus we know; and Paul we know"—the mighty Source of salvation, and the unhesitating, unfaltering proclaimer of it—"but who are ye?"

Likeness to Christ is the aim of the true Christian's life and work. You see in shops poor little plaster casts of the great statues that enchant the world; caricatures they sometimes look like, and they are wrought in a worthless, perishable material. Well, if we cannot do better, let us try to make such a cast of the serene perfectness of Christ's life in our little lives. The original is marble; our copy is plaster of Paris. All the sharp lines may be blunted in our attempted reproduction, and the beauty all but gone, and yet there may be a faint hint of likeness. People whose aesthetic perceptions are but slightly cultivated do not see much difference between Michael Angelo's tremendous statues and the little copies of them that you can buy on the quays at Florence. And some people who cannot look at Jesus Christ, or who will not look at Him, and have not, perhaps, grown up enough to appreciate the Divine perfection of that life, may have their defective power

of appreciation stimulated by looking at us, and may be brought to say, "If the copy is fair, so much fairer than the average men around us, how fair must the Original be ; and how mighty must be the power which out of such worthless, cheap material, can fashion that which has a hint of Jesus, though it is so incomplete a likeness ! " We are here in the world to make Him apprehensible, admired, believed and trusted, by our brethren. Let us keep near Him in the secret place that our faces may shine with reflected lustre, and then come down into the camp to let our light so shine that men may glorify the Uncreated Light at which it was kindled.

The Original and the Copy—

II. “Conformable to His Death”

And they stoned Stephen calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this he fell asleep.—ACTS vii. 59, 60.

THE previous sermon was principally directed to dealing with two of Peter's miracles, the healing of the palsied Æneas and the raising of the dead Dorcas, which were evidently modelled after the fashion of our Lord's works. They suggested the thought that the aim of a true Christian in his life and work should be likeness to the Lord. I complete the considerations on which we entered then by my remarks now, which are mainly directed to the death of the first martyr, which is evidently modelled upon Christ's death. He teaches us how to live; He teaches us how to die. So from the words before us we draw the one thought of what death becomes to a man who is able, by faith and love, to meet it as Jesus Christ met it. It becomes

I. A WILLING AND TRUSTFUL SURRENDER.

I need not, I suppose, spend time in pointing out the evident traces of a deliberate imitation of the great Example in the last words of the proto-martyr, but the difference between the dying Christ's words and the dying Stephen's are as instructive as the resemblances, and fling up these into greater prominence. I do not think it is fanciful, from that point of view, to lay stress on the differences in the order of the two prayers. It was at a very early stage of the long agony of the Cross that Jesus Christ prayed that His murderers might be forgiven, and it was at the end of the agony that He said: "Into Thy hands I commend my spirit." But Stephen reversed the order, for his first cry was: "Receive my spirit," and his second was: "Lay not this sin to their charge." I think that is a hint that the servant had not attained the sublime patience with which the Lord endured the long agony of the Cross. No wonder if, bruised beneath the cruel, heavy stones, and bleeding from many a jagged wound, he, like many another sufferer at the stake or on a bed, cried to the Lord to take him out of his pain.

Then the other difference which springs to sight on the most superficial reading, is that, while Jesus addressed the Father, Stephen addressed Jesus. No doubt the prayer, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit," was the answer of faith to the vision that had been

granted of the opened heavens and the Christ sprung to His feet to help His servant. But, however little conscious of theological inferences to be deduced from this cry to Jesus Stephen was, the fact that here, instinctively and most naturally, at that early stage of the history of the Christian Church, the dying martyr turned to Christ with a prayer does witness to his belief in Christ's divine nature and Lordship over life and death. Strange that a dying man should cry thus for help to a dead man who had not been able to save himself! Inexplicable, as I believe, on any rational ground, without the admission of the great facts of the Resurrection and Ascension. If Christ were risen indeed, and only if so, it was natural that the martyr should turn to the Crucified, and pray: "Receive my spirit."

There is another slight, but very real, difference in the two prayers, in that Jesus said, "*I commend*," laying greatest prominence on His own act of voluntary decease, while the servant said, "Receive," meaning substantially the same thing, but with a difference of perspective, as it were, and giving greater prominence to the Christ-act of reception than to the servant's act of surrender.

Now, all these differences, which though slight, are instructive, rest on, and are the expression of, the one difference that the one death was the death of the Incarnate Word, and the other was the death of the

humble servant, and they hint to us that, however close may be the imitation possible to the best of His followers, either in life or in death, there will always be something over, which cannot be imitated, and before which we can only adoringly bow and aspire.

But now turn, briefly, to the resemblances in this prayer.

I. We see in it, first, A WILLING SURRENDER.

Ah! how different a death into which a believing will enters, concurring with a physical necessity and accepting it, and the death in which a man is dragged out of life by an unwelcome compulsion arising from his bodily condition. He is like a man hanging on the edge of a precipice, and convulsively thrusting his nails into the crumbling rock, and feeling it yielding to his touch. To go out of life because we must, is misery; to go out of it because our wills accept the necessity is triumph and victory. The one is death indeed, the other is the opening of the spirit to the influx of a larger life. Blessed is he who at that last hour goes willingly, because he knows that he goes after his Lord, recognizing that the grave, too, is a “place whither the Forerunner for us is entered,” and hears as he passes into the gloom that Jesus lights up: “he that followeth Me shall not walk in the darkness, but”—even there—“shall have the light of life.” It is blessed to have Him with us, when the awful isolation of death parts us from all others, and the spot where we stand begins to sink, as did the ground round Korah and his

company, and a gap to open which deepens and widens to a gulf, across which the love that is closest can only cast a wistful look. The man that, dying, is made like Jesus can leave earth behind unregretting, and pass into the Obscure unfearing.

There is another thought suggested by that prayer : "Receive my spirit," namely, that there dawned before Stephen's dying eye the vision of falling, not into a vast dim abyss, but into soft and loving hands outstretched. I spoke of dropping from a precipice. Do you expect to drop down, down, down, not knowing into what, or do you expect that a yard or two below your feet there will be stretched out the hands that were pierced with the nails, and which will receive you when you fall ? It is a blessed thing, dying, to drop into the hands of the loving Christ.

That prayer, "Receive my spirit," overlooked all the externals of death and change of condition, and was absorbed in the calm hope : "I shall be closer to Him than ever I was before." That is the one thought that enables us to minimize what else stands up gigantic and threatening at the close of every earthly life. Much in that future is dim, the faint light is peopled with mysteries ; the very glories that are there are so remote from our experience that they have little power really to attract us. But there is one hope—and only one, as I believe—that makes the awful prospect of immortal life a gift and a joy, and that is, that we shall be with

Christ. He is Heaven, and Heaven is He. Stephen knew very little of what he was to meet beyond this earth, but he knew Whom he was to meet, and that was enough for him.

The death, moulded on Christ's, is—

II. A CALM PUTTING AWAY OF EARTHLY PASSIONS.

“Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.” He divested his spirit, as it were, of the foul stuff of hatred and vengeance, because he thought of the Master Who had said, “Forgive them, for they know not what they do.” I need only repeat, in a sentence, what I have already remarked as to the former prayer, viz., that here we have, in the instinctive, not deliberate, address to Jesus Christ in supplication, testimony to the early and deep growth of the highest conception of Christ's character in the primitive Church. Mark how he not only speaks to Christ as the Divine hearer of his prayer, but thinks of Christ as the Judge of men. It is Jesus Whom he asks not to “lay this sin to their charge.” Is not that prayer a testimony, all the stronger because incidental and in the language of devotion not of theology, that the first Christians learned from Christ that “the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment to the Son”? That was the faith which went with the first martyr to his death. Let it be the faith which goes with you through your lives.

Let me remind you of one other point, namely, that this dying prayer of Stephen, whilst it is modelled con-

sciously upon Christ's, is as consciously modelled in contrast to the dying prayer of another martyr. In the Old Testament we read of a certain priest named Zechariah, who in the Temple-courts was stoned, like Stephen, by the rulers and the mob. His last words were : "The Lord look upon it, and require it." Probably that remembrance came to Stephen, and he then and there deliberately chose between the austere petition of the prophet who had been trained under the law of retribution, and the pitying prayer of the Christ who came to establish the law of mercy and love ; and cried, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." In life and in death it is for us to take the example of the Christ, in our attitude to all that are against us or hate us.

Lastly, we have here brought before us the death that is moulded after Christ's as being

III. A CALM SLUMBER.

"When he had said this, he fell asleep." We need quiet ere we can sleep. This man at one moment had his ears stunned with the fierce yells of the cruel mob, and his body tortured with the sharp, rough stones, and the next moment, how far he was from it all ! What a calm ensued on the wild fury ! "He fell asleep," and they might do what they liked with the corpse, Stephen was at rest.

Now of course that image of sleep as a euphemism for death is no peculiar property of Christianity, but the ideas that it suggests to the Christian consciousness are

the peculiar property of Christianity. Any of you that ever were in the Vatican will remember how you go down corridors with Pagan marbles on that side, and Christian ones on this. Against one wall, in long rows, stand the sad memorials, each of which has the despairing ending, “Farewell, farewell, for ever farewell.” But on the other side there are carved no goddesses of slumber, or mourning genii, or quenched lamps, or wailing words, but sweet emblems of a renewed life, and the ever-recurring, gracious motto: “In hope.” To the non-Christian that sleep is eternal; to the Christian that sleep is as sure of awaking as is the sleep of the body. The one affects the whole man; the Christian sleep affects only the body and the connexion with the outer world.

“There is none other thing expressed,
But long disquiet merged in rest.”

The Christian sleep of death does not seal the spirit in torpor. Seen from this side, death is sleep; seen from the other side death is awaking—waking to an intenser life than was ever experienced before; to a keenness of vitality compared with which the highest consciousness of existence and effort that we have ever known is but as the stirrings of a sleeper. “The drowsy pipe of half-awakened birds” does not contrast more with the full-throated notes with which they welcome the sun, than does life here at its fullest and keenest with life yonder,

with which, when we awake in Christ's likeness, we shall be satisfied.

I do not seek to blink the fact that, refine it how you may, and bring to bear Christian motives and principles as you will, the thing continues ugly and repellent. There is a sickly sentimentalism that tries to hide the hideousness of death by fine sayings about it—as artificial as the china wreaths of immortelles that one sometimes sees on graves. There is a hard materialism that refuses to recognize in death anything more than the natural end of natural processes, and so, in the most accurate sense of the expression, makes a man die the death of a dog. There is a recoiling dread of death which keeps many a man all his life in bondage, whenever he thinks about it. And I admit both that its repulsive features remain, and that, by a merciful provision, most men die quietly. But yet I say a Christian man who makes his life like Christ's, and his death like His, passing through the same physical experience as other men, does not die when he dies, but lives for evermore.

I beseech you, dear brethren, take the anodyne of death, the pledge of immortality, the life and death of Jesus Christ received by faith into our hearts. He that thus can, living, keep near the Master, so as to become like Him, will at the last be "conformable unto His death," and find that its blackness is lit up, even as the shadows on sunlit snow are heavenly blue, not black,

and will pass from the imperfect conformities of life, by the way of a death moulded after Christ's pattern, to the perfect union where he shall be for ever with the Lord ; and be “ like Him, for he shall see Him as He is.”

“Without the Camp”

Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come.—HEB. xiii. 13, 14.

CALVARY was outside Jerusalem. That wholly accidental and trivial circumstance is laid hold of in the context, in order to give picturesque force to the main contention and purpose of this Epistle. One of the solemn parts of the ritual of Judaism was the great Day of Atonement, on which the sacrifice that took away the sins of the nation was borne outside the camp, and consumed by fire, instead of being partaken of by the priests, as were most of the other sacrifices. Our writer here sees in these two roughly parallel things, not an argument but an imaginative illustration of great truths. Though he does not mean to say that the death on Calvary was intended to be pointed to by the unique arrangement in question, he does mean to say that the coincidence of the two things helps us to grasp two great truths—one, that Jesus Christ really did what that old sacrifice expressed the need for having done, and the

other that, in His death on Calvary, the Jewish nation, as one of the parables has it, “ cast Him out of the vineyard.” In the context, he urges this analogy between the two things.

But a Christ outside the camp beckons His disciples to His side. If any man serve Him, he has to follow Him, and the blessedness, as well as the duty, of the servant on earth, as well as in heaven, is to be where his Master is. So the writer finds here a picturesque way to enforce the great lesson of his treatise, namely, that the Jewish adherent to Christianity must break with Judaism. In the early stages, it was possible to combine faith in Christ and adherence to the Temple and its ritual. But now that by process of time and experience the Church has learnt better Who and what Christ is, that which was in part has to be done away, and the Christian Church is to stand clear of the Jewish synagogue.

Now it is to be distinctly understood that the words of my text, in the writer’s intention, are not a general principle or exhortation, but that they are a special commandment to a certain class under special circumstances, and when we use them, as I am going to do now, for a wider purpose, we must remember that that wider purpose was by no means in the writer’s mind. What he was thinking about was simply the relation between the Jewish Christian and the Jewish community. But if we take them as we may legitimately do—only remembering that we are diverting them from

their original intention—as carrying more general lessons for us, what they seem to teach is that faithful discipleship involves detachment from the world. This commandment, “Let us go forth unto Him without the camp,” stands, if you will notice, between two reasons for it, which buttress it up, as it were, on either side. Before it is enunciated, the writer has been pointing, as I have tried to show, to the thought that a Christ without the camp necessarily involves disciples without the camp. And he follows it with another reason, “here we have no continuing city, but we seek that which is to come.” Here, then, is a general principle, supported on either side by a great reason.

Let me first try to set before you

I.—WHAT THIS DETACHMENT IS NOT.

The Jewish Christian was obliged utterly and outwardly to break his connexion with Judaism, on the peril, if he did not, of being involved in its ruin, and, as was historically the case with certain Judaising sects, of losing his Christianity altogether. It was a cruel necessity, and no wonder that it needed this long letter to screw the disciples of Hebrew extraction up to the point of making the leap from the sinking ship to the deck of the one that floated. The parallel does not hold with regard to us. The detachment from the world, or the coming out from the camp, to which my text exhorts, is not the abandonment of our relations with what the Bible calls “the world,” and what we call—roughly

meaning the same thing—society. The function of the Christian Church as leaven, involves the necessity of being closely associated, and in contact with, all forms of human life, national, civic, domestic, social, commercial, intellectual, political. Does my text counsel an opposite course? “Go forth without the camp,”—does that mean—huddle yourself together into a separate flock, and let the camp go to the devil? By no means. For the society or world, out of which the Christian is drawn by the attraction of the Cross, like iron filings out of a heap by a magnet, is in itself good and God-appointed. It is He “that sets the solitary in families.” It is He that gathers humanity into the bonds of civic and national life. It is He that gives capacities which find their sphere, their education and their increase, in the walks of intellectual or commercial or political life. And He does not build up with one hand and destroy with the other, or set men by His providence in circumstances, out of which He draws them by His grace. By no means. To go apart from humanity is to miss the very purpose for which God has set the Church in the world. For contact with the sick to be healed is requisite for healing, and they are poor disciples of the “Friend of publicans and sinners” who prefer to consort with Pharisees. “Let both grow together till the harvest”—the roots are intertwined, and it is God that has intertwined them.

Now, I know that one does not need to insist upon

this principle to the average Christianity of this day, which is only too ready to mingle itself with the world, but one does need to insist that, in so mingling, detachment from the world is still to be observed ; and it does need to be taught that Christian men are not lowering the standard of the Christian life, when they fling themselves frankly and energetically into the various forms of human activity, if and only if, whilst they do so, they still remember and obey the commandment, “ Let us go forth unto Him without the camp.” The commandment misinterpreted so as to be absolutely impossible to be obeyed, becomes a snare to people who do not keep it, and yet sometimes feel as if they were to blame, because they do not. And, therefore, I turn in the next place to consider—

II. WHAT THIS DETACHMENT REALLY IS.

Will you let me put what I have to say into the shape of two or three plain, practical exhortations, not because I wish to assume a position of authority or command, but only in order to give vividness and point to my thoughts ?

First, then, let us habitually nourish the inner life of Union with Jesus Christ. Notice the words of my text, and see what comes first and what comes second. “ Let us go forth unto Him ”—that is the main thing. “ Without the camp ” is second, and a consequence ; “ unto Him,” is primary, which is just to say that the highest, widest, noblest, all-comprehensive conception of what

a Christian life is, is that it is union with Jesus Christ, and whatever else it is follows from that. The soul is ever to be looking up through all the shadows and shows, the changes and circumstances, of this fleeting present unto Him, and seeking to be more closely united with Him. Union with Him is life, and separation from Him is death. To be so united is to be a Christian. Never mind about camps or anything else, to begin with. If the heart is joined to Jesus, then all the rest will come right. If it is not, then you may make regulations as many as you like, and they will only be red tape to entangle your feet in. “ Let us go forth unto Him ” ; that is the sovereign commandment. And how is that to be done ? How is it to be done but by nourishing habitual consciousness of union with Him and life in Him, by an habitual reference of all our acts to Him ? As the Roman Catholics put it, in their hard, external way, “ the practice of the Presence of God ” is the keynote to all real, vigorous Christianity. For, brethren, such an habitual fellowship with Jesus Christ is possible for us. Though with many interruptions, no doubt, still ideally it is possible that it shall be continuous and real. It is possible, perfectly possible, that it shall be a great deal more continuous than, alas ! it is with many of us.

Depend upon it, this nourishing of an inward life of fellowship with Jesus, so that we may say “ our lives are hid ”—hid, after all vigorous manifestation and consistent action—“ with Christ in God,” will not weaken,

but increase, the force with which we act on the things seen and temporal. There is an unwholesome kind of mysticism which withdraws men from the plain duties of every-day life ; and there is a deep, sane, wholesome, and eminently Christian mysticism which enables men to come down with greater force, and to act with more decision, with more energy, with more effect, in all the common deeds of life. The greatest mystics have been the hardest workers. Who was it that said, “ I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me ? ” That man had gone far, very far, towards an habitual consciousness of Christ’s presence, and it was the same man that said, “ That which cometh upon me daily is the care of all the churches.” The greatest mystic of the Middle Ages, the saint that rode by the lake all day long, and was so absorbed in contemplation that he said at night, “ Where is the lake ? ” was the man that held all the threads of European politics in his hands, and from his cell at Clairvaux guided popes, and flung the nations of the West into a Crusade. John Wesley was one of the hardest workers that the church has ever had, and was one of those who lived most habitually without the camp. Be sure of this, that the more our lives are wrapped in Christ, the more energetic will they be in the world. They tell us that the branches of a spreading tree describe roughly the same circumference in the atmosphere that its roots do underground, and so far as our roots extend in Christ, so far will our branches

spread in the world. “Let us go forth unto Him, without the camp.”

Again, let me say, do the same things as other people, but with a difference. The more our so-called civilization advances, the more, I was going to say, mechanical, or at least largely released from the control of the will and the personal idiosyncrasy, become great parts of our work. The Christian weaver drives her looms very much in the same fashion that the non-Christian girl who is looking after the next set does. The Christian clerk adds up his figures, and writes his letters, very much in the same fashion that the worldly clerk does. The believing doctor visits his patients, and writes out his prescriptions in the fashion that his neighbour who is not a Christian does. But there is always room for the personal equation—always! and two lives may be, superficially and roughly, the same, and yet there may be a difference in them impalpable, undefinable, but very obvious and very real and very mighty. The Christian motive is love to Jesus Christ and fellowship with Him, and that motive may be brought to bear upon all life—

“A servant with this clause
Makes drudgery divine.”

He that for Christ's sake does a common thing lifts it out of the fatal region of the commonplace, and makes it great and beautiful. We do not want from all Chris-

tian people specifically Christian service, in the narrow sense which that phrase has acquired, half so much as we want common things done from an uncommon motive ; worldly things done because of the love of Jesus Christ in our hearts. And, depend upon it, just as, from some unseen bank of violets, there come odours in opening spring, so from the unspoken and deeply hidden motive of love to Jesus Christ, there will be a fragrance in our commonest actions which all men will recognize. They tell us that rivers which flow from lakes are so clear that they are tinged throughout with celestial blue, because all the mud that they brought down from their upper reaches has been deposited in the still waters of the lake from which they flow ; and if from the deep tarn of love to Jesus Christ in our hearts the stream of our lives flows out, it will be like the Rhone below Geneva, distinguishable from the muddy waters that run by its side in the same channel. Two people, partners in business, joined in the same work, marching step for step in the same ranks, may yet be entirely distinguishable and truly separate, because, doing the same things, they do them from different motives.

Let me say, still further, and finally about this matter, that sometimes we shall have to come actually out of the camp. The world as God made it is good ; society is ordained by God. The occupations which men pursue are of His appointment, for the most part. But into the thing that was good there have crept all manner

of corruptions and abominations, so that often it will be a Christian duty to come away from all outward connexion with that which is incurably corrupt. I know very well that a morality which mainly consists of prohibitions is pedantic and poor. I know very well that a Christianity which interprets such a precept as this of my text simply as meaning abstinence from certain conventionally selected and branded forms of life, occupation, or amusement, is but a very poor affair. But “ Thou shalt not ” is very often absolutely necessary as a support to “ Thou shalt.” If you go into an Eastern city, you will find the houses with their fronts to the street, having narrow slits of windows all barred, and a heavy gate, frowning and ugly. But pass within, and there are flower-beds and fountains. The frowning street front is there for the defence of the fountains and the flower-beds within, from the assaults of foes, and speaks of a disturbed state of society, in which no flowers can grow and no fountains can bubble and sparkle, unless a strong barrier is round them. And so “ thou shalt not,” in a world like this, is needful in order that “ thou shalt ” shall have fair play. No law can be laid down for other people. Every man must settle this matter of abstinence for himself. Things that you may do, perhaps I may not do ; things that you may not do, I very rightly may. “ A liberal Christianity,” as the world calls it, is often a very shallow Christianity. “ A sour Puritanical severity,” as loose-

living men call it, is very often plain, Christian morality. An inconsistent Christian may be hailed as "a good fellow," and laughed at behind his back. Samson made sport for the Philistines when he was blind. The uncircumcised do often say of professing Christians, that try to be like them, and to keep step with them, "What do these Hebrews here?" and God always says to such, "What dost thou here, Elijah?"

Lastly—

III. WHY THIS DETACHMENT IS ENFORCED.

"For here we have no continuing city, but we seek *one to come*." That translation does not give the full force of the original, for it suggests the idea of a vague uncertainty in the seeking, whereas what the writer means is, not "one to come," but *one which is coming*. The Christian object of seeking is definite, and it is not merely future, but present and in process of being realized even here and now, and tending to completion. Paul uses the same metaphor of the city in one of his letters, "Your citizenship is in Heaven." He says that to the Philippians. Philippi was a colony, that is to say, it was a bit of Rome put down in a foreign land, with Roman laws, its citizens enrolled upon the registers of the Roman tribes, and not under the jurisdiction of the provincial governor. That is what we Christians are, whether we know it or not. We are here in an order to which we outwardly belong, but in the depths of our being we belong to another order

of things altogether. Therefore the essentials of the Christian life may be stated as being the looking forward to the city, and the realizing of our affinities with it and not with the things around us. In the measure in which, dear brethren, we realize to what community we belong, will the things here be seen to be fleeting and alien to our deepest selves. “Here we have no continuing city” is not merely the result of the transiency of temporal things, and the brevity of our earthly lives, but it is much rather the result of our vivid realization and continual anticipation of, and our affinity with, the other order of things beyond the seas.

Abraham dwelt in tents, because he “looked for a city,” and so it was better for him to stop on the breezy uplands, though the herbage was scant, than to go down with Lot into the vale of Sodom, though it looked like the garden of the Lord. In like manner, the more intensely we realize that we belong to the city, the more shall we be willing to “go forth without the camp.” Let these two thoughts dominate our minds and shape our lives; our union with Jesus Christ and our citizenship of the heavenly Jerusalem. In the measure in which they do, it will be no sacrifice for us to come out of the transient camp, because we shall thereby go to Him, and come to the City of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, “which hath the foundations.”

At the Altar

By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name. But to do good and to communicate, forget not, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.—HEBREWS xiii. 15-16.

WE saw in the preceding sermon, in speaking on the verses preceding these of this text, that Christ “without the camp” calls His followers to His side; and that detachment from the order of society in which the Christian dwells is part of his absolute duty. But there is another side to the assimilation to Jesus Christ, which is the very essence of the Christian life, and that other side is brought out in the words of this text. They are linked by “therefore” to something that goes before, and that something is a reference to the office of Jesus Christ as the High Priest of His people. Assimilation to Him is to work in that direction too. Detachment from the world does not mean indifference to the miseries, the sins, and the groans of humanity. Since Christ is “without the camp,” so must we be. Since Christ has offered

His "blood, which is the life," so must we offer ourselves. "By Him, therefore, let us offer the sacrifice continually." This writer's conception of religion embraces both the deep secrets of the inner life and the outward life amongst men; he is not preaching a Christianity of the closet or the cloister, when he demands detachment from the world, but he is preaching a Christianity which has indeed its roots in "the secret place of the Most High," but is of the marketplace and the streets, and wherever men do congregate. He who moves amongst men dispensing comfort, redressing wrongs, bringing help and good, is worshipping at the altar, if he is doing these things for Christ's sake, as truly as if he were absorbed in devout contemplation. We have to keep these two things together—detachment from the world, and the priestly office for men.

Let us then, first, look at this lofty general conception of

I. THE TRUE CHRISTIAN LIFE AS A LIFE OF PRIESTLY SACRIFICE.

Now, I do not need to spend your time in adducing the manifold instances in which this thought is insisted on in the New Testament. I suppose I may take them for granted, but let me remind you of one single instance in which, with a remarkable blending, which is not confusion, of metaphor, one of the Apostolic writers tries to fill out the conception by accumulating

all the various elements of the Sacrificial Ritual, and declaring that they all find their truest and loftiest embodiment in the Christian life. The Apostle Peter runs together the notions of Temple, Priesthood and Sacrifice, and makes no scruple of applying the fused product of the three to the one fact of the Christian's experience and the Christian's standing, "Ye are a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices." Every Christian man is a habitation of God. Every Christian man is a priest, consecrated to render to God spiritual offerings. In the depths of his own being, by his own act, he is to offer his own self. And unless professing Christian people in some measure approximate, with ever varying degrees of nearness and imperfectly at the best, but still do approximate, and try to approximate, to the realization of these three blended, lofty thoughts, their Christianity is a very poor thing. Ye are the temple of God, and priests of the Most High, and yourselves are the sacrifices that you are to offer.

Now that whole stream of thought and way of looking at the Christian life is a great deal more than mere rhetorical imagery. It rests upon the fact that all that was expressed, in shadow and in outward symbol, in regard to the deepest truths of men's relation to God, by ritual, is transfigured and fulfilled, receiving its highest and its only real embodiment, in the relations of a believing soul to God and Christ.

So, then, if we are in any deep and real sense Christian people, we have the priest's qualification. And what was that? "Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord." The purity that was aimed at in a merely outward fashion, by elaborate washings and abstinences and restrictions, is to be accomplished in each of us, by our own continuous efforts, making ourselves clear and clean from "all filthiness of flesh and spirit." No man can minister, as every Christian man is bound to do, sacrifices of thankfulness to God and of beneficence to men, unless his hands are clean and his heart pure. And so, dear brethren, this imaginative metaphor which some of you may think mere rhetorical talk, and others of you may be disposed to call, as it has been called, "Hebrew old clothes," is a great deal more than either the one or the other. It lays upon every Christian man and woman a very solemn obligation, which it is impossible to get away from.

But, again, if we are Christian people, we have the priest's prerogative. And what is that? To pass behind the curtain and into the sanctuary. You will find, in some old ruined abbeys, a path worn on the hard stones of the pavement, by which the ministers of the altar passed continually into the secret place. Have our feet worn a way into the inmost shrine? What sort of a priest is he who never, when he can help it, visits the inner chamber where the God dwells?

We have the priest's prerogative. Oh ! that we used it more !

We have the priest's function. And what is that ? To offer sacrifice. I need not spend your time in discussing what is the root-idea of sacrifice. Many different notions may be entertained about that, which are not relevant to my present subject, but a sacrifice is something—generally some precious thing—withdrawn from personal use and dedicated to a god. And if we are Christians, we have it for our eminent duty to live lives which are sacrifices, being thus consecrated, thus referred to Jesus Christ and God, and in which there shall be the element of self-denial and of self-immolation. These three things, reference of all my activities to God, yielding of myself to Him, and slaying of myself, go to make up the conception of sacrifice, without which a Christian profession is still less melodious than sounding brass or tinkling cymbal. A perpetual reference of all my activities to God—that is a hard saying. A perpetual surrender of myself to Him—that is a harder. To take these obstinate wills of ours and bow them, or to take them and hold them in absolute suspense, until He declares His will, and then to close with it, in swift and intimate union, is no easy matter for any of us. And harder than either, and harder than both, and necessary for either and for both, is the last stage in sacrifice, wherein I have to take myself, and with my own hand, “ bind the sacrifice with cords to the

horns of the altar," and with my own hand lift the knife and smite. Self-annihilation is self-preservation ; and the sacrifice is not complete, till each Christian priest can say : " I live, yet, not I, but Christ liveth in me."

So, dear brethren, the metaphor of my text is not a pretty flight of fancy, or a piece of poetic rhetorical imagery. And let me say to you Nonconformists who, by virtue of your ecclesiastical position, oppose sacerdotal pretensions of all sorts, that the Christian truth of the universal priesthood of believers by no means exhausts its power, or its necessary applications, when it smites down the claims of an order in the Christian Church to be priests. It has a grip upon each of us, and is not merely to be used as a protest against sacerdotal assumptions, but as carrying in it the law for the individual life.

So much, then, for the general thought that is here ; let me say a word as to—

II. THE PARTICULAR APPLICATIONS OF THE THOUGHT OF THE PRIESTHOOD OF CHRISTIANS IN THE TEXT.

A double form of this general notion of the life of the Christian as a sacrificial life is set forth here. There is the sacrifice of speech and the sacrifice of deeds. A word or two about each of these.

As to the former, the sacrifice of speech, the words of our text, carefully considered, point to two kinds of it, as is better brought out in the Revised Version's render-

ing: "By Him, therefore, let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of lips which make confession of His name." So there are two kinds of words which are sacrifices, words of praise to God, and words of confession of God to men.

Now with regard to the former of these—the hard word here is that "continually." It is easy to say "Let us offer the sacrifice of praise," but when you add "continually," and exhort to pray without ceasing, to rejoice evermore, in everything to give thanks, then comes the pinch; and then comes in the special element of self-surrender and self-denial which makes praise a true sacrifice. Ah! brethren, there ought to be running through every Christian life, in a continuous stream, the reference in all things to God, the recognition of His hand in all things, and the conviction that all things are working together for our good. But instead of a continuous stream, too often our thankfulness is like rivers in the tropics in dry seasons, the bed dotted with stagnant pools here and there, and not even a trickle of water to connect them together. Our thankfulness is forthcoming sometimes, if at all, when our present circumstances are bright and gladsome; but it fails altogether in the long reaches where there are no such blessings, whereas it ought to be like a broad stream, full from bank to bank, and continuous from its fountains in the hills to its estuary in the ocean.

But that needs a very continual habit of recognizing

God's hand in all things that come to us. When we are always conscious of His working, always sensitive to His touch, then, and only then, will there be the continual flow of our praise to Him. As when the wind sweeps through an Æolian harp, vague wild notes come from its strings, so when the breath of God's mercies touches the chords of our souls, they will vibrate into music, and there will be continual praise, if there is continual recognition of His agency in what befalls us. But along with that recognition there needs to be what is very hard to reach and still harder to maintain, namely, the position in which, lifted above the world and gifted with clearer vision than belongs to sense, we see that all things are ours, if we are Christ's. Then, and only then, will the unrelenting voice of this stream of our praise neither be silenced by the frosts of adversity, nor by the fierce heats of prosperity which dry it up; but seeing that "all things work together for good," and seeing that God moves in all things, we shall be able, even when we have to preface each thanksgiving with the recognition of our losses, to say: "The Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord." The sacrifice of praise may be offered, and should be offered, "continually."

I need not say more than a word about the other aspect of this sacrifice of speech, confession to His name. That is a priestly function which a great many Christian people woefully fail to discharge. I know that it is

“not good form” to talk about religion. I know that we have conventionalities of reticence about the deepest things of our souls which, in the main, are founded on propriety and common sense. I should be the last man to urge Christian people to push their religion in the faces of men out of season. But making all allowances for conventional reticence and insular reserve and personal idiosyncrasies and the like, I do believe that many of us lose a great deal of the strength and blessedness of our religion, because we are so dumb about it. If we love Jesus Christ, it will be natural for us to say that we do. And if we never acknowledge whose we are, we shall run a dreadful risk of losing much of the religion which we are so slow, so ashamed, so afraid to confess. If you keep your Christianity hidden in your doubled-up fist, take care that it does not happen to you as to some simple person in a conjuring entertainment, who has a coin put into his palm, and is bid to shut his hand upon it, and when he opens it, the coin is gone. Brethren, if you would believe, speak. “I believe, therefore have I spoken” is true; and you can turn it round the other way; “I speak, therefore I have believed.”

Now, as to the other side of the general notion of sacrifice, the sacrifice of deeds, only a word need be said. “To do good and to communicate forget not.” That implies that good, Christian people, who are occupied with the sacrifice of praise and confession, are sometimes

apt to neglect the other side, the sacrifice of practical beneficence. People that do not care much about our Christianity are very fond of sneering at evangelistic efforts, and saying: "Oh! you give tracts, when you ought to be looking after housing and social questions of that sort." Well, the New Testament is quite as contemptuous and as condemnatory of that one-sided kind of Christian sacrifices as any scoffer of them all is. And what it says is that the sacrifice of praise to God is the foundation on which is to be built, and on which alone can be built, to any good purpose, the other sacrifice of beneficence and of liberality. "The service of men is the worship of God"—that is true, and noble, but only on condition that reference is had in the mind of the server to the God for whose sake he is serving. As the Apostle James puts it, true worship is not merely the "fruit of our lips," but "to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspeckled from the world." Morality and beneficence are the garments of religion, the body of which religion is the soul; and if you divorce the one from the other, each is one-sided and imperfect. The philanthropy which is not devout is as incomplete, as narrow, as unreliable as is the devotion which is not philanthropical. The two must go together, and neither of them is anything else than a sickly fragment, unless they do go together.

Now I do not purpose to dwell upon what might, indeed, more appropriately have been a sermon by itself;

the emphatic words of this text: “ *By Him* therefore let us offer.” Jesus Christ’s great sacrifice has taken away the obstacle which makes it impossible for men to offer acceptable sacrifice. That death, in which the Lamb of God has borne away the sins of the world, makes it possible that, on the footing of His propitiatory sacrifice, we should offer our sacrifices of thanksgiving. By Him we offer, because He gives to us, through our faith, a share in His own life, and that communicated life moulds us into His own likeness. Since He is a priest, so are we. Since He is a King, we too reign. Since He is a Son, we through Him receive the adoption of sons. Since He is the Light of the world, we, too, through Him are lights. “ *By Him* therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise ” and of beneficence. If the life of each of us is thus a sacerdotal and sacrificial life, then when it comes to a close, we too shall be able to say “ I am ready to be offered,” and our death will be a libation, poured out to the God Who through death has delivered us from death, and it will—

“Thine endless mercies seal,
And make the sacrifice complete.”

Great Hopes a Great Duty

The God of peace that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant.—HEB. xiii. 20.

A GREAT building needs a deep foundation ; a leaping fountain needs a full spring. A very large and lofty prayer follows the words of my text, and these are the foundations on which it rests, the abundant source from which it soars heavenward. The writer asks for his readers nothing less than a complete, all-round, and thorough-going conformity to the will of God ; and that should be our deepest desire and our conscious aim, that God may see His own image in us, for nothing less can be “ well-pleasing in His sight.” But does not such a dream of what we may be seem far too audacious, when we peruse the stained volume of our own lives, and remember what we are ? Should we not be content with very much more modest hopes for ourselves, and with a very partial attainment of them ?

Yes, if we look at ourselves ; but to look at ourselves is not the way to pray, or the way to hope, or the way to grow, or the way to dare. The logic of Christian petitions and Christian expectations starts with God as the premiss, and thence argues the possibility of the impossible. It was because of all this great accumulation of truths, piled up in my text, that the writer found it in his heart to ask such great things for the humble people to whom he was writing, although he well knew that they were far from perfect, and were even in danger of making shipwreck of the faith altogether. My purpose now is to let him lead us along the great array of reasons for his great prayer, that we too may learn to desire and to expect, and to work for nothing short of this aim—the entire purging of ourselves from all evil and sin and the complete assimilation to our Lord. There are three points here : the warrant for our highest expectations in the name of God ; the warrant for our highest expectations in the risen Shepherd ; the warrant for our highest expectations in the everlasting covenant.

I. THE WARRANT FOR OUR HIGHEST EXPECTATIONS
IN THE NAME OF GOD.

“The God of peace”—the name comes like a benediction into our restless lives and distracted hearts, and carries us away up into lofty regions, above the mutations of circumstances and the perturbations and agitations of our earthly life. No doubt, there may be some

allusion here to the special circumstances of the recipients of this letter, for it is clear from the rest of the epistle that they had much need for the peace of God, to calm their agitations in the prospect of the collapse of the venerable system in which they had lived so long. It is obvious also that there were divisions of opinion amongst themselves, so that the invocation of the God of peace may have had a special sanctity and sweetness to them, considering the circumstances in which they were placed. But the designation has a bearing not so much on the condition of these to whom the words are spoken, as upon the substance of the grand prayer that follows it. It is because He is known to us as being "the God of peace" that we may be quite sure that He will "make us perfect in every good work to do His will, working in us that which is well-pleasing in His sight."

And how does that great name, sweet and strong as it is, bear with it the weight of such an inference as that? Plainly enough because it speaks, first of all, of that which I may call an immanent characteristic of the Divine nature. He is the tranquil God, dwelling above all disturbance which comes from variableness and all "the shadows cast by turning"; dwelling above all possibilities of irritation or agitation. And yet that great ocean is not stagnant, but through all its depths flow currents of love, and in all its repose is intensest energy. The highest activity coincides with the supremest

rest. The wheel revolves so swiftly that it stands as if motionless.

Then, just because of that profound Divine repose, we may expect Him, by His very nature, to impart His own peace to the soul that seeks Him. Of course, it can be but the faintest shadow of that Divine indisturbance which can ever fall, like a dove's wing, upon our restless lives. But still in the tranquillity of a quiet heart, in the harmonies of a spirit all concentrated on one purpose, in the independence of externals possible to a man who grasps God, in the victory over change which is granted to them who have pierced through the fleeting clouds and have their home in the calm blue beyond, there may be a quiet of heart which does not altogether put to shame that wondrous promise: "My peace I give unto you." It is possible that they "which have believed" should "enter into the rest" of God.

But if the impartation of some faint but real echo of His own great repose is the delight of the Divine heart, how can it be done? There is only one way by which a man can be made peaceful, and that is by his being made good. Nothing else secures the true tranquillity of a human spirit without its conformity to the Divine will. It is submission to the Divine commandments and appointments, it is the casting-off of self with all its agitations and troubles, that secures our entering into rest. What a man needs for peace is, that his relations with God should be set right, that his own nature should

be drawn into one and harmonized with itself, and that his relations with men should also be rectified.

For the first of these, we know that it is "the Christ that died," who is the means by which the alienation and enmity of heart between us and God can be swept away. For the second of them, we know that the only way by which this anarchic commonwealth within can be brought into harmony and order, and its elements prevented from drawing apart from one another, is that the whole man shall be bowed before God in submission to His will. The heart is like some stormy sea, tossed and running mountains high, and there is only one voice that can say to it, "Peace: be still," and that is the voice of God in Christ. There is only one power that, like the white moon in the nightly sky, can draw the heaped waters round the whole world after itself, and that is the power of Christ in His Cross and Spirit, which brings the disobedient heart into submission, and unites the discordant powers in the liberty of a common service. So, brethren, if we are ever to have quiet hearts, they must come, not from favourable circumstances, nor from anything external. They can only come from the prayer being answered "Unite my heart to fear Thy name," and then our inner lives will no longer be torn by contending passions—conscience pulling this way and desire that; a great voice saying within, "you ought!" and an insistent voice answering, "I will not"; but all within will be at one, and then there will be peace.

“The God of peace sanctify you wholly,” says one of the Apostles, bringing out in the expression the same thought, that inasmuch as He Who Himself is supreme repose must be infinitely desirous that we, His children, should share in His rest, He will, as the only way by which that rest can ever be attained, sanctify us wholly. When—and not till, and as soon as—we are thus made holy, are we made at rest.

Nor let us forget that, on the other hand, the Divine peace, which is “shed abroad in our hearts” by the love of God, does itself largely contribute to perfect the holiness of a Christian soul. We read that “the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly,” and also that “the peace of God will guard your hearts and minds,” and again that the peace of God will sit as umpire in our hearts, detecting evil, judging actions, awarding the prizes. For, indeed, when that peace lies like a summer morning’s light upon our quiet hearts, there will be little in evil that will so attract us as to make us think it worth our while to break the blessed and charmed silence for the sake of any earthly influences or joys. They that dwell in the peace of God have little temptation to buy trouble, remorse perhaps, or agitation, by venturing out into the forbidden ground. So, brethren, the great name of the God of peace is itself a promise, and entitles us to expect the completeness of character which alone brings peace.

Then, further, we have here

II. THE WARRANT FOR OUR HIGHEST EXPECTATIONS IN THE RISEN SHEPHERD.

“The God of peace Who brought again”—or, perhaps, brought up—“from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep.” Now, it is remarkable that this is the only reference in this Epistle to the Hebrews to the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. The book is full of references to that which pre-supposes the Resurrection, namely, the ascended life of Jesus as the great High Priest within the veil, and the fact that only this once is the act of Resurrection referred to, confirms the idea, that in the New Testament there is no division of thought between the point at which the line begins and the line itself, that the Ascension is but the prolongation of the Resurrection, and the Resurrection is but the beginning of the Ascension. But here the act, rather than the state into which it led, is dwelt upon as being more appropriate to the purpose in hand.

Then we may notice further, that in that phrase, “the great Shepherd of the sheep,” there is a quotation from one of the prophets, where the words refer to Moses bringing up the people from the Red Sea. The writer of the Epistle adds to Isaiah’s phrase one significant word, and speaks of “that *great* Shepherd,” to remind us of the comparison which he had been running in an earlier part of the letter, between the leader of Israel and Christ.

So, then, we have here brought before us Jesus Who is risen and ascended, as the great Shepherd of the

sheep. Looking to Him, what are we heartened to believe are the possibilities and the Divine purposes for each of those that put their trust in him? Gazing in thought for a moment on that Lord risen from the grave, with the old love in His heart, and the old greetings upon His lips, we see there, of course, as everybody knows, the demonstration of the persistence of a human life through death, like some stream of fresh water holding on its course through a salt and stagnant sea, or plunging underground for a short space, to come up again flashing into the sunshine. But we see more than that. We see the measure of the power, as the Apostle has it, that works in us, "according to the energy of the might of the power which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead." As we gaze, we see what may be called a type, but is a great deal more than a type, of the possibilities of the risen life, as it may be lived even here and now, by every poor and humble soul that puts its trust in Him. The Resurrection of Jesus gives us the measure of the power that worketh in us.

But more than that, the risen Shepherd has risen as Shepherd, for the very purpose of imparting, to every soul that trusts in Him, His own life. And unless we grasp that truth, we shall not understand the place of the Resurrection in the Christian scheme, nor the ground on which the loftiest anticipations are not audacious for the poorest soul, and on which anything beneath

the loftiest is, for the poorest, beneath what it might and should aspire to. When the alabaster box was broken, the ointment was poured forth and the house was filled with the odour. The risen Christ imparts His life to His people. And nothing short of their entire perfecting, in all which is within the possibilities of human beauty and nobleness and purity, will be the adequate issue of that great Death and triumphant Resurrection, and of the mighty, quickening power of a new life, which He thereby breathed into the dying world. On His Cross, and from His Tomb, and from His Throne, He has set agoing processes which never can reach their goal—and, blessed be God! never will stop their beneficent working—until every soul of man, however stained and evil, that puts the humblest trust in Him, and lives after His commandment, is become radiant with beauty, complete in holiness, victorious over self and sin, and is set for evermore at the right hand of God. Every anticipation that falls short of that and all effort that lags behind that anticipation, is an insult to the Christ, and a trampling under foot of the blood of “the covenant wherewith ye are sanctified.”

So, brother, open your mouth wide, and it will be filled. Expect great things; believe that what Jesus Christ came into the world and died to do, what Jesus Christ left the world and lives to carry on, will be done in you, and that you too will be made complete in Him. For the Shepherd leads and the sheep follow—here afar

off, often straying, and getting lost or torn by the brambles, and worried by the wolves. But He leads and they do follow, and the time comes when "they shall follow the Lamb *whithersoever* He goeth," and be close at His heels in all the good pastures of the mountains of Israel. "We see not yet all things put under Him," but we see Jesus, and that is enough.

III. THE WARRANT FOR OUR HIGHEST EXPECTATIONS IN THE EVERLASTING COVENANT.

Space will not allow of my entering upon the question as to the precise relation of these final words to the rest of the verse, but their relation to the great purpose of the whole verse is plain enough. It has come to be very unfashionable now-a-days to talk about the covenant. People think that it is archaic, technically theological, far away from daily life, and so on and so on. I believe that Christian people would be a great deal stronger, if there were a more prominent place given in Christian meditations to the great idea that underlies that metaphor. And it is just this, that God is under obligations, taken on Him by Himself, to fulfil to a poor, trusting soul the great promises to which that soul has been drawn to cleave. He has, if I might use such a metaphor, like some monarch given a constitution to His people. He has not left us to grope as to what His mind and purpose may be. Across the infinite ocean of possibilities, He has marked out on the chart, so to speak, the line which He will pursue. We have His

word, and His word is this : “ After those days, saith the Lord, I will make a new covenant. I will write my law on their inward parts. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.” So the definite, distinct promise, in black and white, so to speak, to every man and woman on the face of the earth, is “ Come into the bonds of the covenant, by trusting Me, and you will get all that I have promised.”

And that covenant is, as my text says, sealed by “ the blood.” Which, being turned into less metaphorical English, is just this, that God’s infinite propension of beneficence towards each of us, and desire to clothe us in garments of radiant purity, are, by Christ’s death, guaranteed as extending to, and working their effects on, every soul that trusts Him. What does that death mean if it does not mean that ? Why should He have died on the Cross, unless it were to take away sin ?

But the blood of the covenant does not mean only the Death by which the covenant is ratified. We shall much misapprehend and narrow New Testament teaching, if we suppose that. The “ blood is the life.” There is further suggested, then, by the expression, that the vital energy, with which Jesus Christ came from the dead as the Shepherd of the sheep, is the power by which God makes us “ perfect in every good work to do His will, working in us that which is well-pleasing in His sight.”

So, two practical counsels may close my words. See

that you aspire as high as God's purpose concerning you, and do not be content with anything short of the, at least, incipient and progressive accomplishment in your characters and lives, of that great prayer. Again, see that you use the forces which, by the Cross and the Resurrection and the Ascension, are set in motion to make that wondrous possibility a matter-of-fact reality for each of us; and whoever you are, and whatever you have been, be sure of this, that He can lift you from the mud and cleanse you from its stains, and set you at His own right hand in the heavenly places. For the Name, and the risen Shepherd, and the Blood of the everlasting covenant, make a threefold cord, not to be quickly broken, and able to bear the weight of the loftiest hopes and firmest confidence that we can hang upon it.

Great Hopes and a Great Power

The God of peace . . . make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ.—HEB. xiii. 21.

THIS all-comprehensive petition is preceded by, and based upon, a lofty invocation, which gazes on various aspects of the nature and dealings of God, and thence draws large desires and expectations. It is because He is “the God of peace,” it is because He has “brought again from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep,” it is because He has made a covenant with men, and sealed it with blood, that this writer finds in his heart to open his mouth so wide in such a prayer. The “Name” of God is the true encouragement for petitions and the measure of expectations. There must be some proportion between the cause and the effect.

Another observation may be made by way of introduction, and that is, that we have here brought together, as in perfect harmony, and as being cause and effect, two truths which, grasped separately, and being separ-

ated, exaggerated, have split the Christian world. One school has shouted: "God working in you," and has whispered, if it has spoken at all, "to do His will." The other school has divided its shoutings and its whisperings in precisely opposite fashion. One school of opinion has so gazed upon the Divine operations that it has reduced man to a mere tool in His hands; the other has been so fascinated by the thought of the freedom and responsibility of the human agent, that it has practically ignored God. But this writer has taken the two war-cries, and written them both upon his banner. Thus he shakes hands with Paul when he said: "Work out your own salvation, for it is God that worketh in you." The Christian life is first of all an inwrought, and then it is an out-working, life.

We have then, here,

I. THE GREAT CHRISTIAN IDEAL.

There are in the text two kinds of workings, and the parallelism between the two would have been more distinctly observable by an English reader if the same word had been employed for both kinds, in our translation, as is the case in the Greek. We should then have read, "to do His will, doing in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight."

So notice that the external conduct, the doing of His will, comes as consequence and outcome of an inward character which is "pleasing in His sight." Now, it sounds a commonplace that conduct is the outcome of

character, but it is anything but a commonplace if we begin to try to apply it to ourselves. As the fruit to the tree, as the fountain to the stream, so the actions of the Christian man ought to be the direct outcome and issue of his character. But they are not always so; they never are so to the extent that they ought to be. Of course, to a very large extent, everything that a man does is a making visible of his inward self. But then there are large tracts of all our lives which are instinctive, almost purely mechanical, which are done without any conscious reflection at the moment. And the more that these are minimized, the more that the territory of mechanical, instinctive, habitual, unreflective conduct is diminished, and the more that the territory of the self-revealing spirit of a man permeating all his work is enlarged, the nearer he approximates to the ideal. When the work is, as it were, the footprint of the person, when what we do is not merely done because it was done at the same hour yesterday, and we have reached the stage of doing it without thinking about it, then we rise higher in the scale.

But this relation of conduct to character bears with it two very important exhortations. One of them is this: let us see to it that all our actions are brought under the dominion of the inward self; and the other is, let us see to it again, that all of that inward self is translated into actions and made visible thereby. How many of us keep our religion in our pews along with

our hymn books, or put it away in a drawer on the Sunday night with our Sunday clothes, to lie there until next Sunday comes round? How much of our creed influences our conduct? How much of our conduct is shaped by our creed? How much of the outward life is consciously determined by the inward self, and how much of it is mere dead, instinctive, mechanical, unreflective action? Brethren, commonplace and in some aspects inevitable as is this relation shadowed in my text, between the inward and the outward, our lives would be transfigured if we grasped and practised these two principles—make of your every thought an action; let every action be dominated by a thought.

But then, further, there is here the suggestion of what is necessary in order that the outward life should be good—an inward self, pleasing in His sight. What a lofty, lovely, bold thought that is, that the infinite Divine nature stands in such a relation to us poor creatures as that something not unlike the delight that we have in pleasant sights or sweet fragrance is experienced by God! What a wonderful heightening of that thought it is, that you and I, who know ourselves to be very often disgusting to our own better selves, may yet be made to minister something to the joy of the Lord! God is Love, and with whatever modifications that word must be applied to Him, this is an inseparable part of all love—to rejoice and delight in the nobleness of the beloved. What a stimulus that should be to all work! How

different it is to say to a man, "Be so-and-so because it will please God" from what it is to say, "Be good because it is your duty," or "because it is the highest ideal of humanity;" or so on. Bring the personal element into the effort to purge character, and what is else labour and hopeless toil comes to be blessed, as all things are blessed, that are done by love for love's sake, and offered to love.

"Well-pleasing in His sight"—can it be? Can one of our black brooks by any alchemy be so purged as that upon its foul, greasy surface the noonday blue shall be reflected, or the nightly stars quiver in points of light? Yes, as I shall have to show you presently. Here is the Christian ideal, that the black brook that flows out of our hearts may be sweetened, purged, defecated, and made crystalline and translucent—"working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight."

Then, still further, we have here the ideal of what constitutes a good work. It must be the doing of God's will: that is its distinctive characteristic. The popular usage applies the expression "a good work" to certain conventional forms of charity, almsgiving and the like. The New Testament notion of it is simply this—an act done with reference to God, and in submission to His will. Self-regard, making myself my own master, is the tap-root of all ignoble, base, sinful living. And contrariwise, to refer everything to God and to say in regard to action, as in regard to endurance: "Not my

292 GREAT HOPES AND A GREAT POWER

will but Thine be done," lifts the smallest deed into sublimity, and transfigures the commonest and plainest-featured act, and makes all our lives noble and worship. To do His will is to do good works.

Now I know, and I am thankful to know, that there are many noble, self-sacrificing, lovely deeds done by men who have no conscious submission of will, in the doing of them, to God. God forbid that I should say that these are "splendid vices." But I do say that they have not reached the highest possible height of goodness, nor are invested with the fairest possibilities of loveliness with which men's actions might be clothed. I remember being in a rainstorm among the hills, in which the sun suddenly shone out, blazing down upon a mountain ash, and making its bright red berries and wet green leaves a wonder and a delight, and then the blackness came over again, and that flaming miracle turned once more into a common tree. The deeds that have the sunshine of God's face striking upon them, because they are done in obedience to His will, blaze up and flame and are glorified. A good work is a work that "does His will."

Then, lastly, we have it suggested in this ideal that the Christian life ought to be a comprehensive all-round goodness—"in every good work." Do not let us confine ourselves to the type of excellence most congruous to our nature, but try to assimilate the graces which are less kindred to our dispositions. Do not let us

narrow ourselves into one groove of virtue, but let us expatiate over all the field. A tree in a thicket has no chance to expand on all sides. Take it out into a field, and let it have ample space to burgeon ; give air a free circle all round it, and let its roots spread outwards as they will, and the sunshine come to it from sunrise to sunset, and you will get a symmetrical, all-round greenness. That is the kind of grace and virtue that should characterize a Christian.

Such, then, is the ideal—an outward life the true cast and replica of an inward ; an inward character conformed to God's, and so “ pleasing in His sight ; ” deeds done in obedience to Him, and an all-round perfection and excellence. What about the reality ? Is such an ideal as unattainable as actual lines and real triangles that possess all the properties of those of Euclid ? My text says it is not unattainable—“ make you perfect in every good work in order to do His will ; working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight.”

So then, we have here, in the second place,

II. THE GREAT POWER WHICH MAKES THE IDEAL A REALITY.

The word here rendered, “ make perfect ” does not convey the absolute idea of completeness as other words which are similarly translated do ; but it means to equip, or generally to fit for a specific form of service, and it is especially employed in two cases to which I merely point. It is the word which is used when we read

of fishermen by the Lake of Galilee mending their nets ; so it carries the notion of repairing what is broken. It is the word which is used when we read of supplying that which is lacking ; so it carries the notion of bringing additional reinforcements to something that is enfeebled. The power by which the ideal is realized is further stated as being an inward working which is mediated for us through Jesus Christ.

So then we are brought face to face once more with the great Christian Gospel that, through Jesus Christ, that which is lacking may be supplied, and that which is broken may be made whole, and that all that is needed to equip a man for the service which consists in doing God's will, is laid up in Him for us to receive into our hearts.

There is a possibility that all the weaknesses which we feel, which disable us from service, and hamper us at our highest, may by degrees be swept away, and that each of us, conscious as we are of imperfection and of something far more tragic than imperfection—absolute contrariety to the Divine will—may yet be brought into that state in which He shall look upon us and see us to be well-pleasing in His sight. Dear brethren, forgiveness is much, and is an essential part of the process by which the broken, slimy net is mended ; but forgiveness is only a means to an end, a preliminary to the great gift, the gift of eternal life, life from Christ, and life like His. This is the Gospel which we have to preach, and surely

it is a gospel, to men conscious of their own shortcomings and failures, and surely they who have a Divine life imparted to them, and a Divine Spirit working in them, need never despair of becoming "perfect in every good work to do His will," and developing characters "well-pleasing in His sight."

There is the distinction, the blessed distinction and transcendent pre-eminence, of Christianity over every religion and every system of moral improvement that the world has ever seen. They tell us what we ought to be; this makes it possible that we should be it. What is the use of examples. What is the use of laws? What is the use of telling me my duty? I know it well enough; that is not the trouble. The worst man knows a great deal more of what is right than the best man does. What is the good of telling a lame man to get up and walk, and expatiating to him about the loveliness of the road? What is the use of setting before me a headline, and saying: "There, write like that," if my hand is shaking, and my pen is bad, and there is no ink in the ink well? We do not lack moral teaching, we lack moral impulse and power. And because Jesus Christ comes to us, and does not only say, "Run," but lays His hand on the palsied limbs and from the thrill of His touch there comes strength, therefore is He the Leader Whom to follow is made possible by His gifts, and Whom to reach is life and blessedness and perfection.

Lastly, let me gather together—

III. ONE OR TWO PRACTICAL THOUGHTS

from these considerations.

The first of them is this. You Christian people ought to have for your aim what is God's purpose ; and His purpose is set forth in that ideal which I have tried faintly to outline. That is what we are here for, to make it a reality in our own lives. That is what Christ died and lives for. That is what all creeds and forms of worship are for. They are scaffolding to help us to build, but hosts of us never get any further than the scaffolding. That is what all life is intended to produce ; " He for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness." It is God's purpose, let it be your aim.

Again, let us learn the true way by which we can make this aim a reality in our lives. Since the Outward is but the outcome of the Inward, and since the purifying of the Inward is the result of the inflow into it of the life of Jesus Christ, the healing stream, then the main thing that Christian people have to do, in order to grow into perfection, is to keep the communications open, and by desire and prayer and faith to make themselves penetrable by that Divine influence. The first thing to do is not to labour at conduct, but to see after character, and the first thing to do in regard to healing and strengthening character is to lie open to the heavenly influences and let them flow into our hearts. First *be*, then *do* ; and that you may be, let Christ come and make you what He would have you to be. But on the other hand,

whilst there is first of all to be the receiving of the Divine power, there is next to be the applying of it. They have been building a gigantic dam in Upper Egypt. It is in vain that the waters from the upper lands are piled behind it and stored there, or brought down through all the valley of the Nile, unless each peasant leads the water into his own little plot, and carefully directs it round the roots of his own crops. You have the stream, see to it that your garden is watered.

Then, further, let these considerations bring us in very deep humility to the confession of our own deficiencies. We have a Power fit to shake mountains, and in our experience it barely shifts a grain of dust. We have a Power that comes rolling in a great flood, and a mere dribble of it passes into our lives. Men take note of the lives of nominal Christians, and then they turn round to people of my profession and say to us—and they have a right to say, “What is the good of your talking about a great power that will make perfect men? Look at these people who profess to have the power. Are they any better than we are?” Not much; sometimes not so good. What then? If the sick man does not take the medicine he will not be healed; but his not being so is not a demonstration that the physician has made a mistake, or that the prescription is of no use; it is only a demonstration of his own folly. We Christian people are calumniating the power of the

Gospel, because we take so little of Christ's transforming life into our lives.

But do not let me close in a minor key. This great prayer brings us great hopes. There are forces at work upon all Christian souls which are evidently thwarted and yet as plainly have it in them to produce effects far transcending anything in Christian character and conduct that we ever see here. What then? Why this, then—if a vine, planted in cold northern latitudes, can only put forth blossoms that are often shrivelled by frosts before they are set, and never mature under our pale sun, there will be a transplanting to a soil and climate where the abortive bloom shall swell and soften and empurple itself, until it is fit for the table or the winepress of the Lord of the Vineyard. As surely as the crescent moon foretells its own completed silvery round, so surely do the imperfections of the best of us, when taken in connexion with the Divine purpose and the omnipotent forces that are lodged in the death of Jesus and in His life-giving Spirit, predict a state in which all who here humbly trust in Him, and seek to live in obedience to God, shall be perfect in every good work, and wholly and eternally and growingly "pleasing in His sight." The God of Peace "Who brought again from the dead that great Shepherd of the sheep," will bring all His flock where He is, and there they who on earth followed Him afar off with faltering steps and many wanderings, shall

“follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth,” and the children shall all be perfect, as their “Father which is in heaven is perfect.”

The Singers by the Sea

And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire, and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God. And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb.—REV. xv. 2, 3.

THIS vision owes its form partly to the circumstances of the seer and partly to an Old Testament reference. As to the former, John's exile in Patmos occasions unusually numerous allusions to the sea, in this book of the Revelation. The voice of the glorified Redeemer, for instance, reminds him of the thunder of the waves on the rocky coast. The mysterious Beast rises from its abysses, which might hide so much that was foul and strange. Babylon sinks in ruin, like a millstone tossed by an angel's hand into the sea. And when the vision of the new heavens and the new earth dawns, one of its characteristics is, "there shall be no more sea," the emblem of estrangement, of rebellious power, of futile effort.

Similarly in this vision, the glassy sea shot with fire is

but a photograph of what was often seen from John's rocky islet on some still morning when the sunrise "came blushing o'er the sea," or on some evening when the wind dropped, and the flaming west dyed the watery plain with a fading splendour.

Then, as to the other element which colours the representation here, we cannot fail to see that there is an allusion to the Song of Miriam, sung on the banks of the Red Sea, when Pharaoh and his host were buried in the mighty waters. There, as here, the singers stand on the safe shore ; there, as here, they hymn a destruction which opened the way to emancipation and joy. The allusion is underlined, as it were, in the declaration that the Song which here is sung is "the Song of Moses and of the Lamb."

Now, of course, we cannot use highly imaginative representations, like that of my text, as if they were dogmatic statements, and we have to be very careful in deducing any inferences from such figurative language as this. But still, making all allowance for that, we may gather lessons that may be of use to us. We have here brought before us the victorious choir ; their place by the glassy sea, and their triumphant song.

I. THE VICTORIOUS CHOIR.

The description of these jubilant singers is very striking. "They that had gotten the victory over," or, as the Original is presented in the Revised Version, "they that had come victorious from"—and it would

have been even better to have read *out of* than *from* "the beast, and his image and his mark, and the number of his name." They were conquerors who had fought their way out of a certain tyrannical dominion, and had emerged into freedom. Now, I shall not spend time in the discussions which have been very fascinating to many people, and do not seem to me to have been of much use to anybody, as to whether this "Beast" represents a person, and if so whether it is Nero, or whether it is some unknown and still future individual embodiment of certain tendencies. Never mind about that. The important question is, what made the "beast" a beast?

Well—bestiality, to begin with; which, being turned into modern English, is sensuous animalism. Man is poised in the midst, between two orders of being—if I may use the word "order" in reference to one of them—and he may rise or he may sink. He may go up to the level of Divinity; he may come down to the level of bestiality. And if he does not do the one, he will do the other. You have only to look round you to-day to see the animal beneath a great deal of the veneer of civilization and refinement in modern society. The unblushing sensuality, or if I may not use that word, I may at least say sensuousness, of many modern ideals in art, in literature, in daily life—what is it but the beast in the man coming to be predominant? How much that is unblushingly practised, and even defended and

applauded, is really giving a free hand to the Sensuous, which ought never to get a free hand, letting the mutineers come up on deck and take command of helm and sextant, flinging the reins on the neck of the steeds, which do noble work when they are well held in, but set the heavens on fire, like Phaethon's team, when they are allowed their way. There are other aspects of what make the Beast a beast. I put them all in two words, God-forgetting selfishness and God-defying opposition of will against Christ. If you take the context you will find, amidst a great deal that is very difficult to understand, this one thing emphasized, that the Beast and the Lamb divide the world between them, and that whoever is not on the side of the one is on the side of the other. Under which King? Who is *your* Lord and Master? You young people especially, are you going to serve the flesh, or are you going to put your heel on the neck of the brute, and live for the God whom you may bring to dwell within you? Which are you doing?

The next point is that the dominion of this "Beast," which is shorthand for all the lower and animal tendencies, is an established fact, out of which a man has to fight his way. "They have gotten the victory *out of* the Beast, and the number of his name." There is nothing in this world worth the having and the being, which is not the result of a deadly earnest fight. If you make up your minds, or if without ever having had the courage to make them up, you let yourselves drift

into the position of taking up the line of least resistance and doing what is easiest, then your fate is settled, and down you will go. I do not mean in regard to outward things. You may prosper in them, and win wealth or fame if your aims go in that direction, but in regard to the true aims of life, unless you are prepared to fight, you will be a poor creature whilst you live, and a wreck altogether when you come to die. They "got the victory out of the beast;" plucked it from the very jaws of the brute; and that is what we have to do. As the good old-fashioned hymn says:—

Now we must fight if we would reign;
Increas our courage, Lord.

But there is one more thing to note about these victorious choristers. How did they get the victory? There is only one answer to that question—because they joined themselves to the Victor-Lamb. It is a strange paradox that runs through this Book of the Revelation, that, as I have already suggested, the Lamb is pitted against the Beast; and with entire destruction of the verisimilitude of the metaphor, the Lamb is made to be a Warrior-Lamb, Who "goes forth"—strange as it sounds—"conquering and to conquer." That covers a deep truth. Christ cures the animalism of humanity by His sacrifice on the Cross, and by His meekness and gentleness. And if you are ever to overcome your worse self, and to have any share in that jubilant song

of triumph at the last, I believe in my heart of hearts that the only way by which you can do so is by trusting yourselves to Him Who "teaches our hands to war and our fingers to fight."

When He said to us, "be of good cheer; I have overcome the world," He implied that "this is the victory that"—for us—"overcometh the world, even our faith," by which we unite ourselves with Him, participating by derivation in His victorious power, and, therefore, are "more than conquerors through Him that loved us." They have "gotten the victory from the Beast." Let me beseech you to fight under the same Leader and with the same weapons as they did, or the Beast will gain dominion over you.

And now turn to the second point—

II: THE GLASSY SEA BY WHICH THE VICTORS STOOD.

Of course, the allusion to the story in Exodus, and the propriety of the picture, make it necessary that we should suppose that they who stand "on the sea of glass" are not represented as if they had their feet planted on its calm surface, but that "on" here means "above," "by the side of," on the safe shore, with the glassy sea stretching in front of them. Now this sea of glass, by which these victors stood, has appeared already in this book, where it is represented as lying placid and even before the Divine Throne. I suppose that both there and in our text, it represents by a very natural metaphor the aggregate of the Divine dealings and self-

manifestations to men ; on whose calm surface, if I may so say, as on a great, shining mirror, the throne of God and He who sits upon it, are in some degree reflected: One of the Psalms has the same idea, in a somewhat different form, when it says, "Thy way, O God, is in the sea, and Thy path in the deep waters, and Thy footsteps are not known." Another Psalm echoes the thought when it says, "Thy judgments are a mighty deep." And one of the Apostles winds up his discussion about the mysteries of the kingdom of God with, "Oh ! the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God: How unsearchable are His judgments." So I suppose we may consider that it is in accordance with the analogy of Scripture, as well as with the natural propriety of the symbolism, if we see, in this sea of glass mingled with fire, an emblem of the whole dealings of God with man, through which are ever and anon shot, as it were, fiery streaks, like the scarlet threads in Venetian glass.

This noble symbol carries with it some great and precious thoughts. That sea is transparent. It is deep, but it is not dark by reason of mud, but by reason of its clear translucent depth ; and when vision fails, it is not because of obscuration there, but of our weak sight. I have seen a like sea, without a speck of mire or dirt and with no weed on its margin, rising and falling on marble cliffs that it had polished into discovery of their golden veins. Such is this "glassy sea," pure and clean.

“The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.” We know their motives and purposes; they come from Love, they tend towards man’s perfecting. And if, at any time, it is difficult to hold fast by that belief as to their origin because of their complexity, or difficult to see how they tend to that issue, still, as does the psalm to which I have already referred, we have to link together the two conceptions: “Thy way is in the sea” and “Thy way is in the sanctuary.”

Again, the sea of glass was calm and stable. To us, tossing upon it, it often looks tempestuous enough. To them, looking down from above, it is smoothed into a watery plain, a glassy mirror. That crystal sea was shot with fire. The judgments of God necessarily are sometimes punitive, retributive, destructive, but they that are in sympathy with the Lamb, and have shaken off the tyranny of the Beast, in the measure in which they have done so, even here and now see in them, and understand, “the loving-kindness of the Lord” even when He smites.

And so I come to the last point—

III. THE SONG OF THIS VICTORIOUS CHOIR:

I do not attempt to expound it. I simply wish to draw attention to its central thought. These conquering choristers stand, like Miriam and her maiden band with their timbrels, on the safe shore, and as they look out on the calm waters that have buried Pharaoh and his hosts, they lift up their song of praise, because of

the destructive judgments that have led to liberty. The gist of their song is this, that God's dealings with man—the transparent crystal and the fiery streaks—alike are the outcome of His righteous love, and alike are intended to lead men to know and worship Him. Even when there come “terrible things in righteousness” to the world, or to us individually, if we are wedded to Jesus Christ they will yield to us here, and far more clearly and continuously hereafter, occasions for thankfulness, for praise, for clear perception of the Divine character, and for more lowly worship at His feet. “When the wicked perish there is shouting,” says Proverbs. And when God, as is sometimes the case, comes forth and smites into dust some hoary institution that has been the source of miseries to mankind, then men ought to rejoice, and, in spite of sympathy and compassion, ought to feel that God has done a mighty thing in mercy, though mercy had an envelope of wrath. There is nothing of the weak sentimentality which characterizes some people's theories, in the New Testament conception of God. He is the God of love, but His very love must sometimes nerve His arm to strike, and sharpen His spear to slay.

Let us remember that that is true about our individual lives. Let us take our place where the choristers stand by the glassy sea, in so far as we can do so here and now. Let us recognize habitually, that even the retributive and destructive and afflictive acts of God come forth

from His righteousness and for our good, and we shall be less astonished when the bitter draught comes to our lips, and be able to say, even whilst we take it: "The cup which my Father hath given me; shall I not drink it?" And afterwards we shall stand like the harpers by the glassy sea, and praise Him for our sorrows, our losses, our pains; and for all the way by which the Lord our God hath led us.

So let us acquiesce in present imperfect knowledge, and not be in too great a hurry to pronounce, with our fallible judgment, and our partial information as to a half-finished process, what is in accordance with, and what is contrary to, the Divine nature. Abraham had the boldness to say: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"—which did not mean "I will acquiesce in His acts, though I cannot see their righteousness, because He did them;" but did mean: "Men have a standard of right and wrong to which they expect that the Divine acts will conform." That is true, no doubt, but it is a principle that has to be very cautiously applied, for the reasons just stated. We see but a small segment of the circle here, and our judgment of it had best be suspended till we see the perfect round. We shall be most modest and wise if we "judge nothing before the time." But we can confidently accept Christ's promise: "What thou knowest not now, thou shalt know hereafter." Since we may hope to join the victorious choristers by the sea of glass, let us not contradict our

future song of praise by our present murmurings and complaints.

Brethren, this vision shows us, too, the path of victory. Take Jesus Christ for your captain, and in His strength fight, and He will bring you at last to the eternal shore ; and as the unsetting sun rises, it will touch with golden beams the calm ocean, beneath which the oppressors lie buried for ever. If we let the Beast write his name on our foreheads, we shall sink with him in the mighty waters. If we take the Lamb first for our sacrifice, and then for our King, He will break the yoke of bondage from off our necks, and bring us at last to the safe beach, and put a new song into our mouths, of praise to Him Who has gotten us the victory "over the Beast . . . and the number of his name."

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